A

COLLECTION

OF

SERMONS

SHEWING

The Grounds of the LORD's Controverſy with this Church and Land, in reſpect of the Prevalence of Error, the abounding of Immoralities, contempt of the glorious Goſpel, Breach of ſolemn Engagements, awful Abuſe of GOD's Goodneſs, &c.

TOGETHER WITH

The Duty of Saints and Sinners in the Proſpect of threatened Strokes on theſe Accounts.

Preached from different Texts of Scripture, and on ſeveral Occaſions, particularly Faſt-days.

By the late reverend and learned
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He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit ſaith unto the Churches, Rev. iii. 22.

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THESE Sermons were firſt publiſhed in the year 1772. That edition having been quickly ſold, a new one is now offered to the public. The works of the Author are above the Editor's recommendation; but he judges it may be greatly for the glory of God and the edification of his fellow chriſtians, to give them an opportunity of peruſing the following diſcourſes. They are not at all ſuited to the taſte of the preſent Laodicean generation: They warn them faithfully of their ſin and danger. As the corruptions of all things are ſubſtantially the ſame, they reprove thoſe of the preſent age, with the ſame accuracy as if they had been preached but yeſterday. Thoſe therefore who can bear to be faithfully warned of their ſins and danger, will find great advantage in the peruſal of theſe diſcourſes.

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The Duty of redeeming the Time in evil Days, illuſtrated and enforced.

A

SERMON

Preached at ETTRICK, May 27. 1722, being the Lord's Day immediately following the riſing of the General Aſſembly that year.

EPHESIANS v. 16.

Redeeming the time, becauſe the days are evil.

IN the preceding verſe, the apoſtle exhorts the Epheſians to *walk circumſpectly*, that is, accurately, exactly, and preciſely, endeavouring in the moſt minute things in their walk to be regular and holy; ſhewing withal, that true wiſdom requires ſuch exactneſs of life. Our text points out one thing wherein their ſpiritual wiſdom ſhould eſpecally appear, *viz.* "Redeeming the time, becauſe the days are evil." In which words we have,

1. A duty enjoined, *redeeming the time.* The expreſſion is metaphorical, taken from merchants who watch the market, improve the ſeaſon of making gain; and if at any time they have loſt by their negligence, they beſtir themſelves to catch the ſeaſon again when it offers. Thus ſhould we do with the time, or ſeaſon of grace and good works, the ſeaſon for doing or getting good. That time is often miſpent, the ſeaſon is ſlipt; and we muſt endeavour to buy it back again, by doubling our diligence in the preſent time, as the traveller who has gone too ſlow through the day, labours to re-

deem the time by mending his pace, when it grows towards evening.

2. The reaſon of the duty, "becauſe the days are evil." Not that any days are in themſelves evil or unlucky, more than others; but that they were days wherein much evil fell out and was to fall out. The days the apoſtle ſpeaks of were evil, in reſpect of the great evils going on in them among men, which put profeſſors in hazard of ſinning or ſuffering. They were enſnaring days, both in reſpect of principles and practices; falſe doctrine was vented by many, the reſurrection was denied, juſtification by faith alone oppoſed, and the purity of the goſpel overthrown by many: ſcandalous practices were introduced; and perſecution was raiſed in ſeveral places, and was on the growing hand.

The ſcope and meaning of the words may be ſummed up in the following doctrinal note, *viz.*

Doct. *When men's lot falls in evil days, the evil of thoſe days calls aloud to them to redeem time, and double their diligence.*

For the illuſtration of this doctrine, I ſhall ſhew,

I. What it is to redeem time.

II. Why the evil of the days wherein men's lot is caſt ſhould remove them to redeem time.

III. *Laſtly*, Apply the ſubject in an uſe of exhortation and of reproof.

I. The firſt thing propoſed is, to ſhew what it is to redeem time. It imports,

1. A conviction of miſpending of time, and miſimproving ſeaſons of grace. Thoſe will never ſet themſelves to redeem time, who are not duly convinced of their ſquandering it away, ſelling it off, and not enriching themſelves with the price. We have ſeen better days than now they are; glorious days of the Son of man have been in Scotland, in purity, plenty, and peace. But may not the looking back to the improve-

ment

ment made of them, fill us with convictions of miſimprovement? And,

(1.) How many are there, who to this day are out of Chriſt, and have no ſaving intereſt in the covenant of grace, but are "aliens from the commonwealth of Iſrael, and ſtrangers from the covenants of promiſe, having no hope, and without God in the world?" Eph. ii. 12. If the market of free grace were cloſed, they poor ſouls, have as yet bought none of Chriſt's wares, for as long as they have ſtood in the market-place.

(2.) What have ye done for God, and what have you done for eternity, in the time which ye have had? God's glory is the end of your creation; the work he has put in your hand to fill up your time with, is to "work out your own ſalvation with fear and trembling," Phil. ii. 12. Ye were not ſet down in the world, as the leviathan in the ſea, to play yourſelves; but to honour God, and ſee to your eternal ſalvation. Now much of that time is over. Ye have done much to advance your worldly intereſt, to ſatisfy your luſts, to diſhonour God, and to ruin your own ſouls; but what have ye done for God's glory and your ſouls ſalvation?

(3.) Who of us all have done for God, what we might have done, and what we have had opportunity to have done! Have we not ſlipt many precious occaſions that might have been improved for the honour of God? Has not a vain world often cheated us and ſpiritual ſlothfulneſs caſt us into a deep ſleep, and an inactive frame and diſpoſition, while fair and promiſing occaſions have ſlipt through our fingers?

(4.) Has any one of us got that victory over our corruptions, or made ſuch advances in holineſs of heart and life, as are anſwerable to the time that we have had under the means of grace? Have we grown up in grace, anſwerable to the years of our ſtanding in the Lord's vineyard?

(5.) Are ye provided for a time of trial, and furniſhed for a wilderneſs-journey? If not, ſurely it is neither

for want of warning, nor want of time and opportunity; but by miſpending of time. A day of common calamity ſeems to be making haſte upon us; but are our chambers of protection provided by us to enter into? A darkneſs, a miſt is ariſen in the way to Zion; are you ſo acquainted with the way in the clear day, as to be capable to know the road even in a miſt?

(6.) Laſtly, Are your evidences for heaven clear? We know not how ſoon we are to paſs off into another world; but, alas! it is to be feared, that many have no evidences at all for a better world; and that ſuch as have, theirs are very dark. Theſe things may ſuffice to convince of miſpending of time; the redeeming of which imports a conviction of.

2. To redeem time, imports activity and application to our great work which we have to do in the world. Thus we find the ſpouſe ſetting herſelf to redeem time, Cant. iii. 1, 2. "By night on my bed I ſought him whom my ſoul loveth: I ſought him, but I found him not. I will riſe now, and go about the city in the ſtreets, and in the broad ways I will ſeek him whom my ſoul loveth." We muſt at length beſtir ourſelves, ſhake off ſloth, be denied to our carnal eaſe, and ply our work in good earneſt. Merchants who through their own ſlothfulneſs have miſſed their market at a time, will do ſo that they may get their loſs made up: and Chriſtians muſt do ſo too, who mind to redeem their time; for there is no getting ſleeping to heaven.

3. It imports catching of ſeaſons that offer themſelves again for procuring or increaſing our ſpiritual ſtock. We muſt "be ſober, and watch unto prayer," 1 Pet. iv. 7. We muſt do as Benhadad's ſervants did, 1 Kings xx. 33. "Now the men did diligently obſerve whether any thing would come from him, and did haſtily catch it." As men who being to go a long voyage, but have ſlept while wind and tide ſerved, and ſo miſſed the occaſion of ſetting off, will watch the firſt opportunity thereafter, and lay hold on it when

when it comes. Many a fair occaſion for Immanuel's land has been neglected; O that at length we were wiſe to let no more ſlip!

4. Laſtly, It imports improving the preſent time diligently, as men who have a great loſs to make up. Thus did the ſpouſe, Cant. iii. 4. "It was but a little that I paſſed from them, but I found him whom my ſoul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's houſe, and into the chamber of her that conceived me." There is no other way of redeeming paſt time, but by better improving the preſent time while it is among our hands. We ſhould then be more frequent and more fervent in ſpiritual exerciſes, carefully laying out ourſelves, that the time remaining may be filled up to the beſt advantage. Time is precious, let us not be laviſh of it any more.

II. The ſecond head of diſcourſe is to ſhew, why the evil of the days wherein men's lot is caſt ſhould move them to redeem time.

1. Becauſe it is the miſpending of time and miſimproving the ſeaſons of grace, that bring ſuch evil days on a church or people called by the name of Chriſt. That is the fixed rule of God's diſpenſations towards his church, 2 Chron. xv. 2. 'The Lord is with you, while ye be with him, and if ye ſeek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forſake him, he will forſake you." Miſimproving of ſeaſons of grace makes ſinning times, and ſinning times make enſnaring and ſuffering times. And what is the reaſon of all the evils of our day, but unfruitfulneſs under the glorious goſpel? The light has been abuſed, and darkneſs therefore comes on: we have long had light without heat and warmth of affection, and therefore the light itſelf is on the declining hand. And it is highly reaſonable, that ſmarting under miſpending of time we be ſtirred up to redeem it.

2. Becauſe ſuch days threaten the removal of oppor-

tunities of doing and getting good as formerly, Eccl. xi. 2. "Thou knoweſt not what evil ſhall be upon the earth." The days of Noah and Lot were evil days; and they redeemed time, the one by preparing an ark timely, the other by a timely eſcape out of Sodom: and had they not done ſo, the one had been carried away with the deluge, and the other had periſhed in the flames of Sodom. They that will not do when they may, may come to ſee the time when they ſhall not have opportunity when they would. When men have no uſe for God's candle ſet up among them to let them ſee to work, he will readily take it away, or at leaſt it ſhall burn very dim. Redeem time, for God is plainly ſaying to you, "Who among you will give ear to this? Who will hearken, and hear for the time to come?" Iſa. xlii. 23.

3. Becauſe ſuch days are dangerous and enſnaring days, and therefore people have the more need to be on their guard: And if they do not ſet themſelves to row againſt the ſtream of the day, they will be fair to be carried down the ſtream with others. Therefore our Lord ſays, "Becauſe iniquity ſhall abound, the love of many ſhall wax cold," Matth. xxiv. 12. When a land or country is infected with the plague, every one ſees himſelf obliged to take more than ordinary care about himſelf, leſt the ſpreading contagion catch hold of him: now, ſpiritual infection in principles and practices are viſibly ſpreading at this day; and we are like men in a throng, if we do not forcibly preſs forward, we cannot miſs to be carried off our feet, and carried backward by the croud. The cauſe of truth and holineſs is ſo fully on the field againſt a declining generation, that no man can ſtand neutral, but he muſt loſe ground to the enemy.

4. Becauſe God is much diſhonoured in ſuch days; and that ſhould touch our hearts very nearly. This was David's practice, Pſalm cxix. 136. "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes; becauſe they keep not thy law." It is very natural for the children of God, when

when they ſee their father remarkably diſhonoured, that their hearts burn within them, as was the caſe of Paul, when he was at Athens, and "ſaw the city wholly given to idolatry," Acts xvii. 16. Remarkable is the ſtory of the dumb ſon of Crœſus, king of Lydia, who, ſeeing a ſoldier, when his father's capital city, Sardis, was taken by Cyrus the Perſian, ready to give the king, who he did not know, a ſtroke upon the head with his ſcimitar, made ſuch a violent effort and ſtruggle, out of fear and tenderneſs for the life of his father, that he broke the ſtrings of his tongue, and cried out, "Soldier, ſpare the life of Crœſus." The further others go from him, they will endeavour to draw the nearer to him. At ſuch a time there is a ſpecial call from Heaven, ſaying, "Who is on my ſide?" And when the honour of God ſo lies at ſtake, in the conſpiracy of a generation againſt it, it is bad for men to be aſleep; nay, it is high time to awake.

5. Becauſe as redeeming of time is always ſeaſonable, ſo it is in a ſpecial manner ſeaſonable when the days are evil. There is a peculiar beauty in it to be beſt when others are worſt, to be awake when the virgins round about are ſlumbering and ſleeping. God takes ſpecial notice of ſuch; as in the caſe of Noah, of whom it is ſaid, Gen. vi. 9. "Noah was a juſt man, and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God;" and alſo in the caſe of Lot, of whom the apoſtle Peter ſays, 2 Epiſt. ii. 7. 8. "God delivered juſt Lot, vexed with the filthy converſation of the wicked: for that righteous man dwelling among them, in ſeeing and hearing, vexed his righteous ſoul from day to day, with their unlawful deeds." Redeem time in theſe evil days, ſo ſhall ye outſhoot Satan in his own bow, and turn the cannon upon him, who endeavours to carry you away with the ſtream. To take occaſion from good to do evil is deviliſh, but to take occaſion from evil to do good is divine.

6. Becauſe men's own intereſt lies in it. They that are awake in a way of duty while others ſleep ſhall

ſhall reſt in a way of privilege when the peace of others ſhall be broken, Hab. iii. 16. ——— "I trembled in myſelf, that I might reſt in the day of trouble." To ſtand at a diſtance from ſinful courſes, in a ſinning time, is the way to ſafety and comfort in a ſuffering time. Hence is the commiſſion from the Lord in favour of his people, Ezek. ix. 4. "Go through the midſt of the city, through the midſt of Jeruſalem, and ſet a mark upon the foreheads of the men that ſigh, and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midſt thereof." It is pleaſing to the fleſh to go with the multitude, in a time of God's patience with a ſinful generation: but when the Lord comes to plead his controverſy with the generations, there will be a dreadful reckoning, and they will then come off with loſs. But "thou haſt a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they ſhall walk with me in white: for they are worthy," Rev. iii. 4.

7. Laſtly, This is a rational way of acting, and ſo do wiſe men in their temporal affairs. If a harveſt day be cloudy or windy, do not men the more vigorouſly handle their ſickles? If a dearth be feared, are not men the more careful to provide for themſelves? Even the very ants are buſy in harveſt, while the winter is approaching. But, alas! the children of this world are wiſer in their generation than the children of light; and the ſluggard needs to be ſet to ſchool to learn of the ants.

I come now to the application of this doctrine, which is the principal thing I had in view. And

Use 1. ſhall be of exhortation. O let us be ſtirred up to redeem time, becauſe our days are evil. Alas! our days are evil days with a witneſs, and they are ſtill growing worſe and worſe; and the progreſs in the way of evil is ſo ſwift, that we ſeem to be very near arrived at that pitch, at which the Lord's anger may be expected to break forth into a flame. Our days are evil days in ſeveral reſpects; in reſpect of corruption of doctrine and principles of religion; ——— in reſpect

reſpect of abounding ſin;——in reſpect of the hiding of the Lord's face;—in reſpect of threatened wrath and impending judgments;—and in reſpect of the guilt of former times yet unpurged away.

Firſt, Our days are evil days in reſpect of corruption of doctrine and principles of religion. The tares are ſown and grow apace in the Lord's field. Papiſts are ſpreading their poiſon, and Prelatiſts theirs, without due check or control. A ſpirit of apoſtaſy from the faith once delivered of the ſaints, appears eminently in theſe our unhappy days, wherein the very foundations of religion are ſtruck at, and the myſteries of it called to an account before the bar of corrupted reaſon, and meaſured with the crooked reed of man's natural light. And at this day is that fulfilled amongſt us in this church, which the apoſtle addreſſed to the elders of the church of Epheſus, "Alſo of your own ſelves ſhall men ariſe ſpeaking perverſe things, to draw away diſciples after them," Acts xx. 30. The ſpring of goſpel-doctrine, which ſometime ran clear, is now diſturbed, truth is fallen in our ſtreets, and equity cannot enter, and Zion's wounds are multiplied in the houſe of her friends. The days are evil on this account; for,

1. It is very dishonourable to our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, the purchaſe of whoſe blood goſpel-truths are; for of them we ſhould never have heard, had not he given himſelf to the death for loſt ſinners. And the more they are obſcured and vailed, the more is the Mediator's glory eclipſed; which may be matter of mourning to thoſe who love his name.

2. It is an evidence that the favour of the glorious goſpel is much loſt, and that the glorious truths thereof, on which exerciſed ſouls have often ſweetly fed, are much diſrelliſhed. And ſo it ſpeaks ſoul exerciſe to be very rare, and the experience of the power of truth on men's ſpirits to be fallen very low.

3. It is a fore token of the work of converſion, which has long been very rare, its being yet more rare. The goſpel is the great mean of converſion of ſinners unto God,

God, Gal. iii. 2. and therefore Satan ſtrives with all his might to pervert it, and ſo to make it the more unfit for reaching for its end.

4. It is a ſad prognoſtic of the further woful decay of practical godlineſs. The doctrine which is of God is "according to godlineſs," Tit. i. 1. and that which hath not a tendency to promote real godlineſs, is not a doctrine from God. The law in its due place leading ſinners to Chriſt, and leading them as a rule of life in Chriſt, tends to this end: but when it is put out of its due place, it is perverted, and will never produce more like holineſs, but a carcaſe of formal performances unacceptable to God, in ſome; and more licentiouſneſs and untenderneſs in others, as may be obſerved in the lives of thoſe who ſo handle the law as to confound it with the goſpel, John vii. 19. "Did not Moſes give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law?"

5. There is a bias in the corrupt nature of man in a very eminent meaſure, whereby people are ready to entertain corrupt principles and ſo they are ready to be ſubverted by them. For there is not an error vented in the world, but it has ſome one luſt or other akin to it in the hearts of men. And there is a peculiar bias to legaliſm, which is the temptation and ſnare of our days.

6. Human learning is highly advanced in our days, and the power of godlineſs is under a great decay. And none are ſo capable to do a miſchief to religion as thoſe learned men, who are ſtrangers to the power of godlineſs. This is it by which religion comes to be moulded in a ſuitableneſs to carnal reaſon, and ſo is perverted.

7. It is a great ſign of the Lord's anger againſt a ſinful generation, for their not receiving the truth in love. Hence ſays the apoſtle, 2 Theſſ. ii. 10, 11.—"With all deceivableneſs of unrighteouſneſs, in them that periſh: becauſe they received not the love of the truth, that they might be ſaved. And for this cauſe God ſhall ſend

ſend them ſtrong deluſion, that they ſhould believe a lie." This calls aloud to you to redeem the time; and,

1ſt, To labour to get the knowledge of the truth, to know what we believe, and to underſtand the principles of the religion which we profeſs, and for this cauſe to improve the means of knowledge. Ignorance is dangerous at all times, eſpecially in ſuch evil days.

2dly, To ſtudy to know why you believe, and to underſtand the reaſons of your principles. Hence the apoſtle Peter exhorts, "Be ready always to give an anſwer to every man that aſketh you a reaſon of the hope that is in you, with meekneſs and fear," 1 Pet. iii. 15. Many have been too eaſily ſatisfied with the principles which they have learned, without inquiring into the ſcripture-grounds of them; but ſurely this calls aloud to the practice of the Bereans, who were "more noble than thoſe in Theſſalonica, in that they received the word with all readineſs of mind, and ſearched the ſcriptures daily, whether thoſe things were ſo," Acts xvii. 11.

3dly, Labour to be experimental Chriſtians, to feel the power of truth in your own ſouls; to "know Chriſt, and the power of his reſurrection, and the fellowſhip of his ſufferings, being made conformable to his death," Phil. iii. 10. Raw unfelt notions in the head are eaſily parted with in a day of trial; but experience of the power of truth rivets it in the heart: which is the true reaſon why many ſimple men and women hold faſt the truth, when learned divines let it go; for all the human learning in the world will not give men ſuch a hold of the truth as Chriſtian experience will give. Theſe duties the caſe of our day calls for at all hands.

But for your further direction, as to what is your duty at this day, when the harmony in the ſong of the watchmen is marred, and ſome are deſtroying what others build up, and a ſpirit of error is undoubtedly gone forth, I would ſay,

(1.) Be not ye unconcerned with the public ſtate of affairs in that point. For the honour of God and the cauſe of truth, lie at ſtake: and there is a wo denounced againſt ſuch careleſs ones, Amos vi. 1. "Wo to them that are at eaſe in Zion." Some, if they get their own worldly affairs right, they are little concerned to know what way it goes with the church and intereſt of Chriſt; they think it none of their buſineſs, Phil. ii. 21. "For all ſeek their own, not the things which are Jeſus Chriſt's." Some, from a profane and wicked principle of looſeneſs, look on the confuſions of the day with ſatisfaction, ſaying in their hearts, Aha, ſo would we have it, like the children of Edom, who ſaid in the day of Jeruſalem's diſtreſs, "Raſe it, raſe it, even to the foundation thereof," Pſal. cxxxvij. 7. Others ſhew concern about them; but the great thing with them is, thereby to gratify their curioſity, or ſome particular humour of theirs; but their hearts are not affected with them as kindly children of Zion.

But I would adviſe you to a cordial concern, in your moſt ſecret retirements before the Lord, in theſe matters. Take to heart the diſhonour done to God thereby, the wounds given to truth, the ſtroke reached to true religion, and the danger to the ſouls of men. Shew ſuch ſympathy with God's intereſts, as you may be capable to ſay before the Lord, "The zeal of thine houſe hath eaten me up; and the approaches of them that reproacheth thee, are fallen upon me, Pſal lxix. 9. If I forget thee, O Jeruſalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jeruſalem above my chief joy." Pſalm cxxxvii 5, 6. Mourn over theſe things in ſecret, as the ſelect few in Jeruſalem did, Ezek ix. 4. forecited. Wreſtle with God, in prayer for his appearance, for his return to the land, to ordinances, and to the ſpirits of his miniſters and people. Hear what the Lord ſays, "I have ſet watchmen upon thy walls, O Jeru-

O Jeruſalem, which ſhall never hold their peace day nor night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not ſilence; and give him no reſt, till he eſtabliſh, and till he make Jeruſalem a praiſe in the earth," Iſa. lxii. 6, 7.

(2.) Let your hearts be impreſſed with awful thoughts of the anger of God againſt the generation, appearing in that matter, Hab. iii. 16. It is an awful thought, that Zion-builders are now turned like Babel-builders, through the anger of God, that they cannot underſtand one another. It was a ſad ſign to Jeruſalem, when coals of fire were taken from between the cherubims, and ſcattered over the whole city, Ezek. x. 2. And when the angel took fire off the altar, and caſt it on the earth, Rev. viii. 5. fearful confuſions enſued. Theſe coals of fire are ſcattered among us, and the proſpect of the iſſue may cauſe a ſerious obſerver to tremble.

(3.) Be duly affected with the hazard of your own ſou in ſuch a time. There is danger on every hand, whe. the anger of the Lord ſeems to be againſt the whole multitude of us. Let no man adventure to lodge the cauſes of wrath in one party. Some may be deeper than others in the ſinful courſe; but all have a deep hand in the provocation. Hear what the Lord ſays to Iſrael, Ezek. vii. 12, 13, 14. "The time is come, the day draweth near: let not the buyer rejoice, nor the ſeller mourn: for wrath is upon all the multitude thereof. For the ſeller ſhall not return to that which is ſold, although they were yet alive: for the viſion is touching the whole multitude thereof, which ſhall not return: neither ſhall any ſtrengthen himſelf in the iniquity of his life. They have blown the trumpet, even to make all ready, but none goeth to the battle: for my wrath is upon all the multitude thereof." There is a danger of ſtraying both to the right and left hand in this time of the Lord's anger. And if the Lord do not pity, there may be frightful monuments of the Lord's

anger on both hands, giving up men to ſtrong deluſions.

(4.) Give yourſelves ſolemnly away to Chriſt, to be by him carried ſafely through the wilderneſs in the dark and cloudy day. Say with the prophet, "Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my ſalvation, my God will hear me," Micah vii. 7. In conſideration of your danger, take him anew for your guide and leader, ſaying with the ſpouſe, Cant. i. 7. "Tell me, O thou whom my ſoul loveth, where thou feedeſt, where thou makeſt thy flock to reſt at noon: for why ſhould I be as one that turneth aſide by the flocks of thy companions?" Our own wiſdom is not to be truſted at any time, eſpecially when the days are evil. Now when you ſee the miſt ariſing, take faſt hold of him; when you ſee the ſtorm a coming, chuſe him for your pilot, and commit yourſelves to his conduct through the waves.

(5.) Keep up habitually a holy jealouſy over yourſelves, and confidence in the promiſe of direction, and a conſcientious believing uſe of the means of his appointment. That holy jealouſy is neceſſary in reſpect of the ſnares in the evil day, and the corruption of our hearts ſo ready to entangle us in them. "He that truſteth in his own heart, is a fool," Prov. xxviii. 26. The promiſes are many on which faith is to be exerciſed; as, "The meek will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way," Pſalm xxv. 9. "I will inſtruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou ſhalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye," Pſal. xxxii. 8. "Thine ears ſhall hear a word behind thee, ſaying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left," Iſa. xxx. 21. And you muſt uſe the means in confidence of the promiſe, Cant. i. 7, 8. When the ſpouſe prayed for direction, *Tell me*, &c. quoted above, the Bridegroom replied, "If thou know not, O thou faireſt among women, go thy way forth by the footſteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beſide the ſhepherds tents." Go ye and do likewiſe.

(6.) Beware

(6.) Beware of thoſe things particularly, which leave men to be a pray to deluſion in evil days, and for which God leaves them to be carried away with the torrent. And theſe are,

[1.] Worldly-mindedneſs, denoted, Rev. vii. 3. by *the earth*. Carnal earthly profeſſors are ready to get a caſt in ſuch a day; they whoſe God is the world, will be ſure to hold by it, when Chriſt and the world part. Why has the cauſe of God ſo few friends, but becauſe the world has ſo many? The world's eaſe, advantage, good word, and its multitude, have a great ſway with men, to the prejudice of their duty, as in the caſe of Demas, 2 Tim. iv. 10. who forſook the apoſtle Paul, "having loved this preſent world."

[2.] Inſtability and wavering, denoted, Rev. vii. 3. by *the ſea*. They that have itching ears after novelties, are ready to be caught in the ſnare. And hence it is, that at this day old ſolid truths are loaded and diſreliſhed, and the land-marks ſet by our fathers are removed.

[3.] Pride and ſelf-conceit, denoted, Rev. vii 3. by *the trees*. None are readier to fall into the ſnare than thoſe who are high in conceit with themſelves. The humble ſoul lies faireſt to make its way fairly through, while the ſtormy wind blows, and caſts down many tall cedars.

[4.] A ſecret diſguſt of the truth, through a love to unrighteouſneſs, 2 Theſſ. ii. 10. forecited. When practical religion decays in a generation, and ſin abounds, the truth cannot long miſs to be departed from. Luſts ſecretly entertained in the heart, prepare men for quitting of truth in their judgements.

[5.] Formality, Rev. xi. 2. Thoſe that worſhip in the outer court, are ready to become a prey to deluſion.

(7.) Be much converſant in the ſcriptures, "Search the ſcriptures," ſays Chriſt, John v. 39. and there notice what the Spirit of the Lord teaches. The ſcripture is the reed for meaſuring the ſanctuary; it is the infallible word, the only foundation of divine faith.

Try what ye hear by it, as the noble Bereans did, for which they are highly commended.

(8.) Laſtly, Be tender and holy in your walk. "If any man will do his will," ſays our Lord, John vii. 17. "he ſhall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I ſpeak of myſelf." Where men are conſcientious to practiſe known truth, there is hope of being led into all truth; while otherwiſe the Spirit of the Lord being grieved departs.

Secondly, Our days are evil days, in reſpect of abounding ſin. The generation wherein we live hath ſignalized itſelf for looſeneſs and licentiouſneſs, and our iniquity is gone up into the heavens, and the meaſure of it is faſt, very faſt filling up. Our "land (we may ſay) is filled with ſin againſt the holy One of Iſrael," Jer. li. 5. The abounding of ſin in our day appears in that,

1. Sins of all ſorts are to be found amongſt us, whether againſt the firſt or ſecond table. The truth is, contempt of God and of religion hath made moſt fearful advances: the goſpel is deſpiſed, the holy laws of God are violated, his bands are broken, and his cords caſt away. The land is defiled with idolatry, ſuperſtition, ſinful ſwearing, Sabbath-breaking, unfaithfulneſs in all relations, murders, uncleanneſs, diſhoneſty, and fraud, lying, and covetouſneſs. And what can be found among a people profeſſing the name of Chriſt to bring wrath on them, that is not to be found in Scotland at this day? Particularly, there are two ſigns of a generation poſting to ruin, that have appeared of late more than for many years before.

(1.) Horrid blaſphemies, ſhewing what height the generation is come to in contempt of God. Not only is there a fearful outbreaking of blaſphemous principles, overturning the foundation of Chriſtianity; but many fearful blaſphemies and blaſphemous practices have been occaſionally vented and ſet up of late, to fill up the meaſure of the iniquity of the land.

(2.) Rampant oppreſſion, to ſhew what a low paſs humanity

humanity is at in theſe dregs of time. I doubt if there be any alive that ever ſaw as much oppreſſion in this land, when it was neither a time of war, nor of perſecution, as we have neither of them at this day. When was that ſo much verified as at this day, "The people ſhall be oppreſſed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour: the child ſhall behave himſelf proudly againſt the ancient, and the baſe againſt the honourable," Iſa. iii. 5. Theſe things can hardly miſs to fill our cup to the brim.

2. Corruption of manners has overſpread all ranks in church and ſtate; and it is come to that, Gen. vi. 12. "God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all fleſh had corrupted his way upon the earth." Not only religion, but ſobriety is almoſt gone out of faſhion with thoſe of the greater ſort, ſo that they have altogether broken the yoke, and burſt the bonds; and the meaner ſort follow the example, alas! too much; and there is a viſible growing untenderneſs among thoſe whoſe character and office in the church obliges them to give a holy example to both. So that look after religion where you will, it will be found at a very low paſs in the practice of it.

3. Religion is ſo much on the declining hand, that there is not ſo much as a ſtanding ſtill and not mending, but a growing worſe and worſe ſtill. The generation is ſtill growing forward in apoſtaſy from God, and not going, but running further and further wrong. New cauſes of wrath are ſtill produced in the progreſs of time; and Satan's kingdom is viſibly increaſing. The evil is growing worſe and worſe, and many ſometime hopeful have taken off the maſk, and appear in their native colours.

4. The ſins of ſons and daughters are more and greater than ordinary. They are ſo mixed with the men of the world, that they have learned much of their way, and have left their firſt love, Rev. ii. 4. There is a cloud even upon them, ſo that they have

not that life, ſpirit, and tenderneſs that ſometimes they had. And they that depart from evil make themſelves a prey.

And what makes theſe days of abounding ſin worſe, is,

1*ſt*, That they are come in over the belly of much light. Our days have been days of much goſpel-light, but the truth has been held in unrighteouſneſs, and men have rebelled againſt the light: ſo the light is grown weaker, and the works of darkneſs have got the upper hand.

2*dly*, Our national hazards and deliverances have been many and ſignal; and behold the fruit of them, as if we had been delivered to do all theſe abominations. If either threatened judgments or merciful deliverances could have cured us, we had been in another caſe at this day: but all theſe things ſeem to have been blaſted.

3*dly*, There are few, very few to ſtand in the gap, Ezek. xxii. 30. Few that have either heart or hand to oppoſe themſelves to the torrent of wickedneſs: few mourners over the abominations done in the midſt of us. I doubt not but there are ſome who truly ſigh and cry for the abounding ſin of our day. But I doubt if our Zion theſe many years has afforded fewer of that ſort. Theſe our provocations have been of ſo long continuance, that though at their firſt appearance they were moving, yet the horror of them ſeems to be abated by cuſtom: beſides that many of the ſometimes mourners in Zion are themſelves deeply involved in the backſliding courſes of the day.

Theſe things make our days evil days: for,

(1). The diſhonour done to God, and the provocation thereby given to the eyes of his glory, is great beyond expreſſion: "The name of God is blaſphemed among the Gentiles, through you," ſays Paul to the Romans, chap. ii. 24. Our land has been ſingularly privileged, being married to the Lord in ſolemn covenant,

nant, and her renown has ſometimes gone thro' many nations: But, ah! how is God diſhonoured, and religion expoſed, by ſuch fearful departures from the Lord!

(2.) They are enſnaring days. O how hard is it for people to keep their feet in ſuch a day, and not to be carried away with the ſtream? Rev. iii. 5. How hard is it to keep up a due horror of ſin, while on every hand of us it is ſo lightly looked upon? Temptation is ſtrong in ſuch a day.

(3.) They are days that while they laſt, little good and great can well be expected in them. Hence ſaid the Lord by the man of God unto Eli, "Them that honour me, I will honour; and they that deſpiſe me, ſhall be lightly eſteemed," 1 Sam. ii. 30. A generation ſo much diſhonouring God, it can be little expected that God will honour. We would fain hope that the Lord will yet bring glorious days; but it is very probable that many of the preſent generation ſhall be ſhovelled out of the way in the firſt place. Hence ſaith the Lord, Ezek. xx. 37, 38. "I will cauſe you to paſs under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant. And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that tranſgreſs againſt me."

(4.) The conſequences of them can hardly miſs to be dreadful. "Shall I not viſit for theſe things? ſaith the Lord: ſhall not my ſoul be avenged on ſuch a nation as this?" Jer. ix. 9. Where ſin comes to ſuch a height, readily ſevere judgments quickly follow. And we can ſee nothing that may give any hope that we ſhall miſs to ſee ſad days, but that the Lord can pour out his Spirit, and turn us back: but, alas! in the mean time we look always the longer unlike ſuch a merciful turn in our affairs.

(5.) Laſtly, They have a ſad aſpect on poſterity. The Jews crucified Chriſt above ſixteen hundred years ago, and their children to this day are ſmarting under it. And ſure I am, if matters continue in the courſe they are in at this day in this land any long time,

the

the ſucceeding generation will be in a miſerable plight.

Theſe things call aloud to redeeming of time. And,

1. Conſider well your own ways, that you may ſee if you be joined or not in the conſpiracy againſt God with the generation; Hag. i 5. "Thus ſaith the Lord of hoſts, Conſider your ways." Alas! it may be eaſily ſeen, that moſt of us are deep in the ſcore, and none of us can wipe our mouths, and ſay juſtly, we have not ſinned, we have not had a hand in the general declining.

2. Beſtir yourſelves, and "ſave yourſelves from this untoward generation," Acts ii. 40. Take another way than the common courſe of the day wherein you live. God is ſaying, "Come out from among them, my people, be ye ſeparate, and touch not the unclean thing:" ſtand at a diſtance from their ſinful ways, and be not partakers with their ſins, leſt ye partake of their plagues.

3. Live near God, and by your tender holy walking give a practical teſtimony againſt the abounding ſin of the day. Advert to the ſaying of the wiſe man, Prov. xxviii. 4. "They that forſake the law, praiſe the wicked: but ſuch as keep the law, contend with them."

4. Be mourners in Zion, wreſtlers with the Lord in the caſe of the evil of the days. Mourn for your own ſins and the ſins of others.

5. Laſtly, Strengthen and ſtir up one another in the way of the Lord. The people of God had need to animate one another in duty, in a ſpecial manner when the torrent of ſin runs high, that ſo they may the better oppoſe it, and keep themſelves from being carried away with it. Follow the practice of the Lord's people who lived in a very declining time of the Jewiſh church, recorded Mal. iii 16. "Then they that feared the Lord, ſpake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before

before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name."

Thirdly, Our days are evil, in regard they are days of the hiding of the Lord's face. Well may we ſay as Iſa. xlv. 15. "Verily thou art a God that hideſt thyſelf, O God of Iſrael the Saviour." The Lord's gracious appearances in the powerful operations of his Holy Spirit on the ſouls of men, make good days: and ſometimes there have been ſuch eminently good days: but, alas! our days are evil, being days of God's hiding his face; whereof take theſe evidences.

1. The little power and efficacy on the ſouls of men, that accompanies ordinances at this day. Well may we ſay, as Iſa. liii. 1. "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" A ſound work of conviction is very rare, and the work of converſion is yet more rare. The word is heard, but where is the fruit of it? They that were filthy are filthy ſtill. The profane are not reformed, the ſecure ſinner is not awakened, the formal profeſſor is not brought acquainted with the power of godlineſs, and they that have the root of the matter in them are not ſo liberally fed as ſometimes they were. Whence is all this, but that the Lord hides himſelf, and appears not in the aſſemblies of his people as ſometime a-day? We have ſinned away his preſence, and provoked him to ſay, "Your new moons, and your appointed feaſts my ſoul hateth: they are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them," Iſa. i. 14.

2. The great rarity of lively experienced Chriſtians in our day. It is the promiſe, Mal. iv. 2. "Unto you that fear my name, ſhall the Sun of righteouſneſs ariſe with healing in his wings; and ye ſhall go forth, and grow up as calves of the ſtall." Some ſuch there are, but alas the number of them is very ſmall. Moſt of the virgins are aſleep; deadneſs and formality, and eſtrangedneſs from the life of faith, prevail among thoſe who are called by the Lord's name; and ſoul-exer-

ciſe

erciſe is rare to be heard of. The beſt that can be made of our caſe is that, Rev. iii. 4 "Thou haſt a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments; and they ſhall walk with me in white: for they are worthy."

3. The diviſions, diſſenſions, and oppoſition one to another, that are to be found among the Lord's own ſaints and people. Sometimes there has been in our land a very fair ſeparation betwixt the enemies and the friends of real godlineſs; ſo that whatever difficulties the children of God had with the common adverſary, they were at one among themſelves: but now, alas! it is otherwiſe; the Lord's own children are fallen out by the way, and thoſe who are dear to God, and ſhall meet in heaven, cannot hit it upon earth. For the Lord is hiding his face from us, and we are left in a miſt.

4. The Spirit of counſel and wiſdom is with-held. In the management of civil and church matters at this day, that ſeems to be much accompliſhed, Iſa. xxix. 14.—"The wiſdom of their wiſe men ſhall periſh, and the underſtanding of their prudent men ſhall be hid." We are rowed into deep waters, and inſtead of bringing us ſafe back, we are carried further and further into the depths. The Lord is provoked to withdraw, and ſo our wounds cannot be healed. The days muſt needs be evil in this reſpect: for,

1ſt. Such days cannot be thriving days for religion, and the cauſe and intereſt of God; Pſal. lxxxi. 12. "I gave them up," ſays JEHOVAH, "unto their own hearts' luſt: and they walked in their own counſels." When the ſun withdraws in the winter, nothing can be expected but that the face of the earth will be barren: and when the Lord hides his face from a church, matters cannot proſper there. Backſlidings are increaſed, all goes to wreck, for that which holds matters right is withdrawn.

2dly, Such a day is a day of ſpiritual plagues. As God's preſence goes, all darkneſs, diſorder, and confuſion

fuſion follows, according to the meaſure of the Lord's withdrawing. The goſpel does men hurt inſtead of doing them good; the wild grapes of wickedneſs are brought forth inſtead of good grapes, &c.

This calls aloud for redeeming of time; and,

(1.) To beſtir ourſelves to lament after, and to lay hold upon a departing God and glory. We ſhould make that our work, 1 Sam. vii. 2. "All the houſe of Iſrael lamented after the Lord." And let it not be ſaid of us as Iſa. lxiv. 7. "There is none that calleth upon thy name, that ſtirreth up himſelf to take hold of thee: for thou haſt hid thy face from us, and haſt conſumed us, becauſe of our iniquities." We ſhould be as Jacob ſaying, "I will not let thee go, except thou bleſs me," Gen. xxxii. 26 and the diſciples, "Abide with us, for it is towards evening, and the day is far ſpent," Luke xxiv. 29. And this we ſhould be as we would not be eſteemed to be of the Gadarene temper, who beſought Chriſt to depart out of their coaſts. O cry mightily, that the Lord may not leave us nor forſake us.

(2.) Endeavour to walk uprightly in ſuch a crooked generation; for the worſt of times ſuch ſhall get good of the Lord's word, Micah ii. 7. "Do not my words do good to him that walketh uprightly?" The Lord never forſakes his people utterly; and the more that any do ſet themſelves to be perfect in their generation, they may be ſure it will go the better with their ſpirits.

(3.) Laſtly, Double your diligence in ſecret duties; be much in prayer; and eſpecially cry with much fervency to find a meal for yourſelves in public ordinancies. I think we ought to conſider, when we are to go to ordinances, that this is a day of the hiding of the Lord's face, wherein he is angry with our mother, and therefore is but little ſeen in her houſe; and therefore we had need to be more importunate in ſetting the appointment.

Fourthly, Our days are evil, in regard they are days of

of threatened wrath and impending judgments. The clouds of wrath are hanging over our heads, and we have many ſad preſages of a ſtroke. We many here notice three things.

1. The ſins of the generation are come to a monſtrous height. And as the progreſs thereof is ſomewhat unordinary, ſo it ſeems to ſhew that the cup of theſe nations is near the brim.

2. The Lord's hand has been heavily laid on a nation abroad, from which theſe nations have taken an example of ſinning, and the Lord may juſtly puniſh us accordingly *.

3. Enemies are ſtill buſy in their contrivances to bring the nations into blood and confuſion; and the increaſe of Popery, and the diviſions in the nations on civil and ſacred concerns, do expoſe us to be the more eaſy prey.

This calls aloud to the redeeming of time; and,

1ſt, To awaken out of ſleep, and ſeriouſly to conſider the ſigns of the time, the tokens of wrath gone out againſt us, that the day may not overtake us unawares, Matth. xvi. 3. We have had many warnings of an approaching ſtroke, but mercy has ſo often interpoſed for our delivery, that grace to improve them not coming along with them, we are generally more ſecure than formerly; and the more ſecure, the more likely is the ſtroke to be near: 1 Theſſ. v. 3. "For when they ſhall ſay, Peace, and ſafety; then ſudden deſtruction cometh upon them, as travel upon a woman with child; and they ſhall not eſcape."

2dly, To prepare for a time of trial, Amos iv. 12. "Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Iſrael: and becauſe I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Iſrael." The time ſhould be improved as Noah did his, Heb, xi. 7. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not ſeen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an

* The author means the plague, which firſt began at Marſeilles in France, and made terrible havock in that kingdom.

an ark to the ſaving of his houſe." And the beſt preparation is that, Micah v. 5. "This man ſhall be the peace, when the Aſſyrian cometh into our land." Their caſe was ſad in Noah's days who were without the ark; ſo when the Lord's anger goes through a land, the caſe of thoſe muſt be very ſad who are out of Chriſt.

3dly, To ſtay our too eager purſuit after the world, and be content with little, and rather to be taken up about our ſouls, and how to be carried through in the evil day. Let us regard what Jeremiah ſaid to Baruch, Jer. xlv. 5. "Seekeſt thou great things for thyſelf? ſeek them not."

4thly, To labour to ſettle matters, and keep them clear between God and you, that there be no ſtanding controverſy betwixt the Lord and you.

Fifthly, and *laſtly*, Our days are evil, in reſpect of the guilt of former times yet unpurged away. Our days are like thoſe of Joſiah, 2 Kings xxiii. 26. "Notwithſtanding, the Lord turned not from the fierceneſs of his great wrath, wherewith his great anger was kindled againſt Judah, becauſe of all the provocations that Manaſſeth had provoked him withal." The perfidious treachery and apoſtaſy of the land from the covenanted work of reformation, the blood of the ſaints ſhed for the cauſe of God, with the oppreſſions, violence, and perſecution on that ſcore, are like the iniquity of Baal-peor, from which the land is not purged to this day. And this generation are ſerving themſelves heirs to it, by the many pieces of defection ſtill carried on at this day. So that God ſeems to be about to reckon with the preſent generation for all together.

This calls to the redeeming of time, to be taking a back-look of the national controverſies of old and of late, to be mourning over them, and the diſhonour done to God by them; and to be preparing to meet the Lord in the way of his judgements.

I ſhall conclude all with another uſe, namely,

USE II. Of reproof to two ſorts of perſons.

1. To thoſe who go with the ſtream of the evil days, and are themſelves following the profane and backſliding courſes of the day, that make the time ſo evil. Alas! how many are there, who are drawing on wrath on themſelves and on the land by their irreligion, profaneneſs, and apoſtaſy from God? Let ſuch conſider,

(1.) How dangerous it is to be found among thoſe who are in a conſpiracy againſt God, to provoke his wrath againſt a land. When the flood of diſhonour to God runs ſo high, thoſe that join themſelves in the ſinful courſes of the day, they not only have a hand in provoking God againſt themſelves, but they are the Achans in the camp, the Jonahs in the ſhip, having a notable hand in bringing wrath on others too.

(2.) The higher one's hand is in a ſinning time, the deeper may their ſhare be expected to be in a time of ſuffering or calamity, when the Lord will appear to vindicate the glory of his name.

2. To thoſe who weigh not the evil of the days, but live on careleſsly, and are never ſtirred up to their duty thereby. They conſider not how matters ſtand betwixt God and the generation. This is a common evil amongſt us, and a ſad evidence of the low ſtate of religion at this day. O that ſuch would be ſtirred up to conſider their ways, and the grounds of the Lord's controverſy with the generation. Awake, O ſleeper, and call upon thy God, leſt thou periſh in the furious ſtorm, which is likely to break out upon us. It is not a time to live at eaſe and unconcerned, when ſo many marks of the Lord's diſpleaſure are ſo viſible, that he who runs may read. Awake therefore, ſhake off thy ſloth, and betake theyſelf to the Lord Jeſus by faith, as the only means of thy eſcaping the wrath that is to come.

Paſing

Paſſing under the Rod, a Means of a People's being brought into the Bond of the Covenant.

A

SERMON

Preached on a Faſt-day, at ETTRICK, Thurſday December 1. 1720.

EZEKIEL xx. 37.

And I will cauſe you to paſs under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.

IN theſe words we have a ſcheme of God's diſpenſation towards Iſrael, a people with whom he was angry, but had kindneſs for. In which we may obſerve,

1. A ſharp trial threatened; "I will cauſe you to paſs under the rod." This rod is not to be underſtood of the king's rod or ſceptre, but the ſhepherd's rod. God was the Shepherd of Iſrael, but they had ſtraved away from him. In the verſe preceding this he tells them, that he would bring them together into the wilderneſs, and plead with them as he did with their fathers in that deſert; and that the way he would treat them there, would be by cauſing them to paſs under the rod. Compare Lev. xxvii. 32. The wilderneſs was Babylon, and the places about it, the place of their captivity. The rod was the ſeventy years captivity, and the hard treatment they met with during that period. The Lord tells them, that he would manage that mat-

ter as exactly as one does in telling of ſheep for teinding them; that he would make ſuch a diſtinction and ſeparation among them, as was made by the ſhepherd's rod, when the flock was teinded: in a word, that he would teind them, and the ſtock ſhould go for it one way or other, but he would keep the teind to himſelf. Thus it was in the wilderneſs, where the body of that generation that came out of Egypt, fell, and never entered Canaan. Thus very few of them that went to Babylon came back, but either died or otherwiſe were left there. Compare verſe 38.

2. The happy iſſue of this trial to the remnant that won through; "I will bring you into the bond of the covenant." This concerns the Lord's teind that fell to him by the whole paſſing under the rod. They had all ſlipt the bond of the covenant; their national idolatry had cut the very ſinews of it: but God would make them willingly put their necks again under the ſacred bond. And ſo it was propheſied they would do, Jer. l. 5. "Come, (ſay they) and let us join ourſelves to the Lord, in a perpetual covenant that ſhall not be forgotten." Compare Neh. ix. ult. "And becauſe of all this, we make a ſure covenant, and write it." See chap. x. 28.—39. And they adhered ſo firmly to this covenant, that they never after fell to idolatry.

The doctrine I obſerve from the words is,

DOCT. *Juſtice mixed with mercy towards a generation, to whom God's covenant is a burden, cauſes the treacherous generation to paſs under a rod, deſtructive to many of them, trying to all of them, and ſo brings them back into the bond of the covenant.*

In England and Ireland, the bond of the covenant has lain among their feet and trod upon theſe many years; In Scotland, church and ſtate has looſed the bond, ſo that it is hanging down among our feet at this

this day. There are three ways of God's dealing with ſuch a generation.

1. The way of unmixed juſtice, laying the heavy curſe of the covenant upon them, and either utterly deſtroying them that they ſhall be no people, or unchurching them that they ſhall be no people of God. Thus he dealt with the old world, Gen. vi. 13. "The end of all fleſh is come before me;——and behold, I will deſtroy them with the earth." And thus he threatened to do with the church of Epheſus, Rev. ii. 5.—"I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candleſtick out of his place, except thou repent." And it is well known, that this threatening has been awfully accomplihed.

2. The way of unmixed mercy or ſovereign grace, making wide ſteps over the iniquities of men, leaping over mountains, and melting them with love into repentance and reformation. Of this we have a remarkable inſtance, Iſaiah lvii. 17, 18. "For the iniquity of of his covetouſneſs was I wroth, and ſmote him. I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have ſeen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him alſo, and reſtore comforts unto him, and to his mourners." Sometimes the Lord takes that way, as Micah v. 7. "The remnant of Jacob ſhall be in the midſt of many people as the dew from the Lord, as the ſhowers upon the graſs, that tarrieth not for men, nor waiteth for the ſons of men." But this is more to be deſired than hoped.

3. The way of juſtice mixed with mercy. This is the common road of providence, in which juſtice and mercy each act their part, and is the way in our text, and which we have ground to look for.

In diſcourſing further from this ſubject, I ſhall,

I. Shew that this is the common method of providence in ſuch a caſe.

II. What are thoſe rods the Lord cauſeth ſuch a generation to paſs under.

III. How by ſuch means a people are brought back into the bond of the covenant.

IV. Give the reaſons of this diſpenſation.

V. Apply.

I. I ſhall ſhew, that this is the common method of providence in ſuch a caſe. This appears,

1. From plain ſcripture-declarations of the mind of God in ſuch a caſe, as Hag. ii. 7. "I will ſhake all nations, and the deſire of all nations ſhall come." Shaking times go before reforming times. A hot furnace precedes the purifying of a droſſy church, as Iſaiah i. 25, 26. "I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy droſs, and take away all thy tin. And I will reſtore thy judges as at the firſt, and thy counſellors as at the beginning: afterwards thou ſhalt be called, The city of righteouſneſs, the faithful city." See chapter iv. And we have a paſſage moſt pat to our purpoſe, Zech. xiii. 8, 9. "It ſhall come to paſs, that in all the land, ſaith the Lord, two parts therein ſhall be cut off, and die; but the third ſhall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as ſilver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they ſhall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will ſay, It is my people; and they ſhall ſay, The Lord is my God." This is a ſweeping ſtroke carrying off the moſt part, a hard trial to thoſe that are left, and the covenant renewed with them.

2. From ſcripture-inſtances. What heavy bondage did the Iſraelites ſuffer in Egypt, before God took them into the Sinai covenant? They met with a ſweeping ſtroke in the wilderneſs, before they entered into Canaan. The temple was built, and they had glorious days, in Solomon's reign; but before that almoſt continual wars in David's time, famine for three years, and about the latter end of his reign ſeventy thouſand were ſwept away by the peſtilence. They had ſeventy years captivity before the building of the ſecond temple.

And

And thus was accomplished that prediction, Mic. v. 12, 13. "In that day also he shall come even to thee from Assyria, and from the fortified cities, and from the fortress even to the river, and from sea to sea, and from mountain to mountain. Notwithstanding the land shall be desolate, because of them that dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings."

II. I shall shew what are those rods the Lord causeth such a people to pass under. The Lord has many rods for this purpose, and can make use of any or many of them together as he sees meet. I will name four of them.

1. A blasting curse upon the substance of a land, Hag. i. 9. "Ye looked for much, and lo it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it." God brings sometimes a generation of his anger into such a case, that nothing thrives with them which they take in hand, 2 Chron. xv. 5, 6. "In those times there was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in, but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the countries. And nation was destroyed of nation, and city of city: for God did vex them with all adversity." This rod God is causing these lands to pass under at this day, whereby trade and credit are disturbed, and many ruined; and even wise men smart: for God can make the wise as well as fools pass under his rod, easier than a shepherd can run his sheep, when he has a mind. Alas! there is little to be had by plaistering over a tottering house ready to fall. The black bargain the nations have made between themselves, for which the bond of the covenant behoved to be broke asunder, and the horrible perjury and wickedness used among some trading men, may be plainly read in the present circumstances of the nations.

2. The sword, Lev. xxvi. 25. "I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant." Many a time God has been threatening these perfidious nations with passing under this rod, and he has

has given them of late ſeveral earneſts of it: but it is to be feared, that what has happened of that kind is but an earneſt of the bloody ſword for theſe nations, that ſhall avenge the quarrel of the covenant. The Lord will not want inſtruments when he has a mind. He can hiſs for the bee of Aſſyria out of the remoteſt parts, and ere he want, will ſet Manaſſeh againſt Ephraim, and Ephraim againſt Manaſſeh, and pull out the men of his anger, be they great or ſmall, like ſheep, and cauſe them paſs under the rod.

3. Famine, Ezek. v. 16. "I will ſend upon them the evil arrows of famine." This is a native coniequent of the ſword, and would ſoon be at the heels of it among us. See a terrible deſcription of it, Lam. iv. 7. and downwards. Saul's murdering of the Gibeonites contrary to a covenant with them, brought three years famine on Iſrael, 2 Sam. xxi. . What may a nation expect then for murdering of men for their adherence to the nation's covenant with God himſelf? which is a crime that God has to lay to the charge of Scotland. We had an earneſt of this too ſome years after the revolution, which made many a pale face, and laid many in the duſt; but whatever is added to the controverſy ſince, one may eaſily ſee the quarrel is not yet removed.

4. The peſtilence, which has a frequent connection with the other two, Lev. xxvi. 25. "I will ſend the peſtilence among you.—And when I have broken the ſtaff of your bread, &c. Ezek. v. 16, 17. I will ſend upon them the evil arrows of famine, ——— and peſtilence." That is a deſolating rod. It ſwept off at once among the Iſraelites fourteen thouſand ſeven hundred men, Numb. xvi. 49. For David's numbering the people ſeventy thouſand fell by it in one day. God is now avenging the dragooning in France, and their other cruelties upon the poor proteſtants, by that dreadful viſitation. And theſe nations have ground to fear it is coming that way to them, conſidering it has caſt

the

the abominable copy in much wickedneſs, which theſe lands have followed.

Theſe are the rods which will be deſtructive to many, and trying to all who are cauſed to paſs under them.

III. I ſhall ſhew how by ſuch means a people are brought back into the bond of the covenant.

1. Such a paſſing under the rod, make people apt to receive convictions of their unfaithfulneſs in the covenant. Hence ſays the Lord, Hoſea v. *ult*, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and ſeek my face: in their affliction they will ſeek me early." It is hard to convince men of their proſperous wickedneſs. In the time of God's patience, men will draw fair covers over their foul actions, eat, and wipe their mouths, and ſay, they have not ſinned. But if God were riſen up out of his place to puniſh the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquities, the heavy rod will extort confeſſions of guilt which one would not let light before. Every one is ready to blame another now, and lay the guilt off themſelves: but ſuch a day in Scotland would not leave a clean face amongſt us all. Hence is that promiſe, Ezekiel vii. 16. "They that eſcape of them, ſhall eſcape, and ſhall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them mourning, every one for his iniquity."

2. It would make men blithe to plead the privileges of the covenant, Iſaiah lxiii. 15, 16. "Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of thy holineſs and of thy glory: where is thy zeal and thy ſtrength, the ſounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies towards me? are they reſtrained? Doubtleſs thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Iſrael acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our father, our redeemer, thy name is from everlaſting." They that undervalue God's covenant now, being cauſed to paſs under the rod, the weight of it would make them

them change their note; as it did to Iſrael, Pſalm lxxviii. 34. 35. "When he ſlew them, then they ſought him: and they returned and inquired early after God. And they remembered that God was their rock, and the high God their redeemer." The covenant with hell and death being rent aſunder by the anger of God, and not being able to afford them any more ſecurity, they would be glad to catch hold of God's covenant, which they trod on before.

3. It would remove many a dead weight from off the covenant, both perſons and things. For thus ſpeaks the Lord to Iſrael, Ezek. xx. 38. "I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that tranſgreſs againſt me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they ſojourn, and they ſhall not enter into the land of Iſrael." Micah vii. 10, 11. forecited. Many a dead weight is lying at this day on the work of God in theſe nations, which there is no appearance of the removing of, till the Lord put to his own hand. But he can turn them off with a touch of his hand: for thus he addreſſed Iſrael, Ezekiel xxxvii. 12. "Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cauſe you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Iſrael." Making the generation paſs under the rod, he will either remove them out of the way, or render them inefficacious, that they ſhall not be able to ſtop a good work.

4. It would put an edge, by the bleſſing of the Lord, upon the ſpirits of the remnant, to take hold of the covenant, and preſs them on to it, as their neceſſary courſe in a day of diſtreſs Jer. l. 5. "They ſhall aſk the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, ſaying, Come, and let us join ourſelves to the Lord, in a perpetual covenant that ſhall not be forgotten." Compare Neh ix. 36, 37, 38. "Behold, (ſay the Iſraelites, after their return from the Babyloniſh captivity,) we are ſervants this day, and for the land that thou gaveſt unto our fathers, to eat the fruits thereof, and the good thereof, behold, we are ſervants in it. And it yieldeth

yieldeth much increaſe unto the kings whom thou haſt ſet over us, becauſe of our ſins: alſo they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleaſure, and we are in great diſtreſs. And becauſe of all this, we make a ſure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and prieſts ſeal unto it." Ay, ſuch a day would make men ſtep over many impediments without ceremony, which they cannot get over in a day of eaſe. Neceſſity has no law, and need makes the naked run.

IV. I ſhall give the reaſons of this diſpenſation. I only offer theſe three.

1. God takes this method, that he may thereby lay by many, whoſe eyes he will not let ſee the great things which he minds to do for his people and the church, Ezekiel xx. 38. forecited. The generation in the wilderneſs provoked him ſo, that he cauſed their carcaſes fall therein, before he brought the people into Canaan. There may be ſome whom God has a ſpecial controverſy with, that he will have out of the way, before he make his glorious work appear, Amos ix. 10. "All the ſinners of my people ſhall die by the ſword, which ſay, The evil ſhall not overtake nor prevent us."

2. That he may thereby purge away the droſs of thoſe whom he will make ſharers of the glorious day, Iſaiah i. 25, 26. formerly cited. Like the three children, they muſt be caſt into the fire, that their bonds may be burnt off them. They muſt feel the corroſives, before they get the cordial.

3. That he may awaken the generation to ſome ſenſe of religion, and particularly bring in ſome elect ones yet walking in darkneſs, whom he will neither ſweep away with the multitude, nor yet make witneſſes of the glorious days in that caſe, Hoſea ii. 6, 7. "Therefore behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that ſhe ſhall not find her paths. And ſhe ſhall follow after her lovers, but ſhe ſhall not overtake them,

and

and ſhe ſhall ſeek them, but ſhall not find them: then ſhall ſhe ſay, I will go and return to my firſt huſband, for then was it better with me than now."

V. I ſhall make ſome ſhort improvement of this point.

1. This gives a ſad proſpect of the lot of this generation. It is true, God may deal with us in a way of ſovereign grace: but ſure we have ground to expect, in the common courſe of providence, a heavy day of paſſing under the rod. All have gone aſtray: we have the guilt of former times unremoved yet: the iniquities of the preſent times have gone over all the banks: the goſpel is doing very little good. We are incorrigible under leſſer ſtrokes, and bring forth no fruit of deliverances, but that we grow worſe daily. Immoralities are come to a prodigious height: and the generation is in a plain courſe of defection from God, in principles as well as practice. What can the end of theſe things be?

2. Yet it gives ſome ground of hope of better days on the other ſide of the ſtroke. Who knows but God may ſanctify ſome national calamity or other to bring us back into the bond of the covenant, and yet make glorious days in theſe lands? We are not to deſire the ſtrokes of his hand; but if that be the Lord's mind concerning us to take that way with us, let us lay our hand on our mouth, and ſo ſteer our courſe that if poſſible we may get through.

But it may be inquired, What courſe ſhould one take, in ſuch a doubtful event, for his own ſafety? I anſwer,

1. Make up your peace with God in Chriſt, coming in perſonally into the bond of the covenant. In the worſt of times this will make you ſafe, and ſet you beyond the reach of eternal wrath. For "there is now no condemnation to them which are in Chriſt Jeſus," Rom. viii. 1. And David, as it were in his laſt moments could ſay, "Although my houſe be not ſo with God; yet he hath made with me an everlaſting covenant, ordered in all things and ſure: for this is all my ſalvation, and all my deſire."

2. This

2. This being done, lay down yourſelf at the Lord's feet, reſigning yourſelf to his diſpoſal come what will; as David did in his deſtreſs, when flying from Jeruſalem, on account of the unnatural rebellion of his ſon Abſalom: "Carry back the ark of God into the city, (ſaid he to Zadok the prieſt:) if I ſhall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and ſhew me both it, and his habitation. But if he thus ſay, I have no delight in thee: behold, here am I, let him do to me as ſeemeth good unto him," 2 Sam. xv. 25. 26. They may periſh in a common calamity, whoſe ſouls ſhall go ſtraight to glory. We have no ground of doubting but many are in heaven this day, whom famine, ſword, or peſtilence have ſent thither. Moſes himſelf died in the wilderneſs, and was kept out of Canaan for his wilderneſs-provocation. Thoſe who are in Chriſt, die they or live they, die what way they will, are ſafe.

3. But endeavour ye to be beſt when others are worſt, and ſave yourſelves from this untoward generation. Go not into the God-provoking courſes of it, but repent and turn off from them in time. And mourn for the ſins of others, and the diſhonour done to God thereby. If there be any way to be ſafe in a time of common calamity, that is it. This was Noah's practice; for we are told, Gen. vi. 9. that "Noah was a juſt man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God." And this is clear from Ezek. ix. 4. The Lord ſaid unto him, Go through the midſt of the city, through the midſt of Jeruſalem, and ſet a mark upon the foreheads of the men that ſigh, and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midſt thereof." If ye will partake with the generation of God's anger in their ſinful looſe ways, how can ye miſs to partake with them in their plagues? But thoſe who endeavour to walk with God in a ſinning time, and to hold off from entering into the conſpiracy, God will ſee to them in a ſuffering time.

An untoward Generation characterized, with the Means to be ſaved from it.

A

SERMON

Preached at ETTRICK, on a Faſt-day, December 7. 1721.

ACTS ii. 40.

Save yourſelves from this untoward generation.

THESE words are a part of the advice which Peter gives to his hearers, particularly to thoſe of them who were convinced of their ſin, and deſired to know what courſe they ſhould take to be ſaved. He bids them repent and be baptized, and return to the Lord by Jeſus Chriſt. And to enforce this, he ſets an encouragement before them, aſſuring them they ſhould be welcome, verſe 39. "For the promiſe is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God ſhall call." And he preſſes the neceſſity of it, as they tendered their own ſafety, and would not involve themſelves in the ruin that was abiding the generation in which they lived; "Save yourſelves from this untoward generation." In which words we may notice,

1. The character of the generation among whom their lot was caſt; they were an "untoward generation." They were a crooked, perverſe, and froward ſet of men, who were not ſo much through weakneſs led out of the way, as through wickedneſs bent to forſake the way. They were wilful and headſtrong in their

their evil courſes, and would not be reclaimed, but proceeded from evil to evil. He points out that generation as a ſignally untowardly one, "this untoward generation," who have ſignalized themſelves for obſtinacy, rebellion, and apoſtaſy, having crucified the Lord of life, and being ſtill carrying on the war againſt him; being the generation that Moſes ſpecially pointed at, Deut. xxxii. 20. "They are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith."

2. The lot abiding that generation, namely, ruin and miſery, by the wrath of God breaking out on them, in as remarkable a manner as they had ſinned. This is implied in that expreſſion, "Save yourſelves from" them. As if he had ſaid, They are a generation of God's wrath, a generation devoted to deſtruction, engaged in a courſe that will have a fearful end. Our Lord had foretold it, Matth. xxii. 7. "But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he ſent forth his armies, and deſtroyed thoſe murderers, and burnt up their city. Chapter xxiii. 35, 36. "That upon you may come all the righteous blood ſhed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, ſon of Barachias, whom ye ſlew between the temple and the altar. Verily I ſay unto you, All theſe things ſhall come upon this generation." And accordingly it came to paſs in the fearful deſtruction that was brought on them by the Romans.

3. The right courſe to be taken for ſafety in ſuch a caſe, "Save yourſelves," &c. Partake not with them in their ſins, that ye partake not with them in their plagues. The houſe is coming down, the breaking will come ſuddenly at an inſtant; ſave yourſelves, flee for your life, that ye be not cruſhed with the fall thereof.

The text furniſhes this doctrine, viz.

DOCT. *They that would ſee to their own ſafety, muſt beſtir themſelves, and timely ſave themſelves from*

an untoward generation, whom wrath from the Lord is abiding.

I ſhall endeavour to proſecute this doctrine in the following method.

I. I ſhall ſhew what ſort of a generation is an untoward generation, whom wrath from the Lord is abiding.

II. What courſe one muſt take that would ſave himſelf from ſuch an untoward generation.

III. Lay down ſome motives to ſtir you up to ſave yourſelves from this untoward generation.

I. I ſhall ſhew what ſort of a generation is an untoward generation, whom wrath from the Lord is abiding. They are,

1. A generation become proof againſt the means of grace, the glorious goſpel of Chriſt. Such was this generation in the text. Chriſt himſelf preached to them, and his apoſtles too: but how did they receive it? Hear the obſervation of the evangeliſt upon it, John xii. 37, 38. "But though he had done ſo many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: that the ſaying of Eſaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he ſpake, Lord, who has believed our report? and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" And look to what the apoſtle ſays, Rom. x. 16. "But they have not all obeyed the goſpel. For Eſaias ſays, Lord, who has believed our report? It is true, there were three thouſand converted at this ſermon of Peter's; but what were they and others that were picked up here and there by prevening grace, in compariſon of the body of that generation, who remained obſtinate infidels? They were but as a little remnant that God reſerves to himſelf, in the worſt of times, for a ſeed, Rom. ix. 29. So wrath came on that generation, as the apoſtle obſerves, 1 Theſſ. ii. 16. "Wrath is come upon them to the uttermoſt," according to the threatening, Mat. xxii. 7. forecited.

And

And is not this the caſe of the preſent generation? We have long enjoyed the goſpel, and we are as thoſe who are rendered deaf by the continual ſound of many waters. To whom ſhall we now ſpeak? who now believes the report of the goſpel? They have ſometimes trembled at the word, who now ſit like brazen walls againſt it. Their conſciences have been ſometimes eaſily touched, which are now as ſeared with a hot iron. What can be expected, but that God will change his meſſengers, and try ſharp rods after a ſlighted word?

2. A generation wherein corruption of life and manners is become univerſal, having overſpread all ranks of perſons. Thus was it with this generation in the text, wherein prieſts and people were all gone wrong. This was the character of the generation ſwept away with the flood, Gen. vi. 12. "God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt: for all fleſh had corrupted his way upon the earth." When David conſidered his generation as ſuch, how was his heart moved? Pſal. xii. 1, 2. "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaſeth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men. They ſpeak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips, and with a double heart do they ſpeak." And behold his only comfort, verſe 7. "Thou ſhalt keep them, O Lord, thou ſhalt preſerve them from this generation for ever." When Micah ſaw his generation ſuch, how does he lament the caſe! chap. vii. 1. 2. "Wo is me, for I am as when they have gathered the ſummer-fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage: there is no cluſter to eat: my ſoul deſired the firſt ripe fruit. The good men is periſhed out of the earth: and there is none upright among men: they all lie in wait for blood; they hunt every man his brother with a net," &c. And ſee the courſe he reſolves on verſe 7. "Therefore I will look unto the Lord: I will wait for the God of my ſalvation: my God will hear me."

And alas! is not this our very caſe? Is not pro-

taneneſs and wickedneſs like a flood gone over all its banks? If we look into the generation, what profane ſwearing, drunkenneſs, biting and devouring one another, and uncleanneſs abound among us, in the midſt of goſpel-light! Is this the fruit of plenty, fulneſs, and thriving in the world? Take heed the day come not wherein the bodies thus abuſed to the diſhonour of God, ſhall lie upon the face of the ground as dung, and there be none to bury them, whereof the plague has given the French nation a ſad experience. If we look abroad through the nations, religion is truly fallen under contempt. Looſeneſs and licentiouſneſs is become faſhionable, the flood-gates of debauchery are ſet open, and there is no ſtemming of the tide. And the generation has not ſtopt at ordinary crimes, ordinarily found among a corrupt people: but they have proceeded to an open defiance of Heaven, by Atheiſm and blaſphemy. What prodigious blaſphemies have been heard of, of late? The foundations of Chriſtianity are ſapt by damnable hereſies. The power of religion has of a long time been very ſmall; and now the principles of true religion are in hazard of being loſt, not only among people, but paſtors. What a dreadful conjuncture is this, wherein Arianiſm, the denying of the ſupreme Godhead of Chriſt, and his equality with the Father, is ariſen amongſt Diſſenters in England and Ireland, and legaliſm, by which the purity of the goſpel-doctrine is corrupted, prevails, and is countenanced ſo much in Scotland at the ſame time? This univerſal corruption ſpeaks us to be a generation of wrath.

3. A generation incorrigible, and deaf to all calls of providence, whom mercies draw not, and leſſer ſtrokes cannot drive to repentance. Hence the apoſtle addreſſes the Romans, chap. ii. 4, 5. "Or deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his goodneſs, and forbearance, and long-ſuffering: not knowing that the goodneſs of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardneſs and impenitent

impenitent heart, treaſureſt up unto thyſelf wrath againſt the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgement of God." And thus Jeremiah addreſſes the Jews, chap. v. 3, 9. "O Lord, are not thine eyes upon the truth; thou haſt ſtricken them, but they have not grieved; thou haſt conſumed them, but they have refuſed to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refuſed to return. Shall I not viſit for theſe things? ſaith the Lord: and ſhall not my ſoul be avenged on ſuch a nation as this?" This generation in the text had met with ſeveral leſſer ſcourges before the fatal ſtroke came on them; they had the greateſt of mercies conferred on them by the preaching of Chriſt and his apoſtles; and they got near to forty years ſpace of repentance after they had crucified the Lord of glory; but they waxed worſe and worſe, inſtead of being bettered; and ſo wrath came on them to the uttermoſt.

And is it not ſo with us at this day? What a variety of providences has this generation been tryſted with! How often ſince the revolution has all been in hazard, and yet our ruin has been mercifully prevented, God ſaying in effect as Hoſ. xi. 8. "How ſhall I give thee up, Ephraim? how ſhall I deliver thee, Iſrael? how ſhall I make thee as Admah? how ſhall I ſet thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." How were the nations ſaved from imminent ruin as to all their ſacred and civil intereſts, by King George's happy acceſſion to the throne, when ready to be ſwallowed up by a Popiſh pretender! The nation was gently ſcourged by the rebellion, which God in his mercy put a ſtop to, that the whole land was not filled with blood, as that rebellion threatened. Theſe lands have been much impoveriſhed, by unhallowed projects ſet up to enrich them. We have been long threatened with the peſtilence, raging in a neighbouring nation; yet God has hitherto averted

ed it. And what is the fruit of all theſe mercies, ſtrokes, deliverances, and long-ſuffering? Are we better thereby? So far from it, that we are viſibly growing worſe and worſe. One ill ſtep is taken upon the back of another; ſo that cauſes of wrath are ſtill multiplying, and the cup now fills ſo faſt, that the meaſure of our fathers ſeems to be near the brim.

4. A generation impatient of check, control, or reproof, in their ſinful courſes, but bent to carry all before them. Such a one was that in the text. The followers of Chriſt witneſſeth againſt them; but what was the effect of it? They were cut to the heart thereby, inſtead of being pricked at the heart. They were enraged at them, inſtead of being reformed by them. And ſo they perſecuted them, to fill up the meaſure of their cup. So the apoſtle ſpeaks of the Jews at that time, 1 Theſſ. ii. 15, 16. "Who both killed the Lord Jeſus, and their own prophets, and have perſecuted us; and they pleaſed not God, and are contrary to all men: forbidding us to ſpeak to the Gentiles, that they might be ſaved, to fill up their ſins alway." There is hope of a perſon, or ſociety, whatever their faults be, as long as they can bear to have their faults told them, and are willing to amend: but when once it comes to that, that "they hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that ſpeaketh uprightly," Amos v. 10. it is a ſad ſign of approaching ruin.

How evident is this in our caſe? Men cannot endue reproof. Well may we apply that to the hopleſs caſe of this generation, Hoſea iv. 4, 5. "Let no man ſtrive, nor reprove another: for thy people are as they that ſtrive with the prieſt. Therefore ſhalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet alſo ſhall fall with thee in the night, and I will deſtroy thy mother." Church-diſcipline is contemned, private reproofs are apt to incenſe the reproved againſt the reprover, people generally being ſuch men of Belial, that one needs ſcarcely ſpeak to them of what is amiſs in their way.

And

And as to public miniſterial reproofs in the preaching of the word, men are not able to bear them, if they touch them cloſely. Credit falſely ſo called, prevails in that caſe among all ranks more than conſcience. What then can be expected, but that God will reach the generation ſuch a reproof as they ſhall not get ſhifted.

II. I proceed to ſhew what courſe one muſt take that would ſave himſelf from ſuch an untoward generation.

More generally, he muſt open his eyes, and look. And,

1. He muſt look about him, and behold the face of the generation, and conſider ſeriouſly the way they are going, and the untowardneſs therein appearing; otherwiſe he will never beſtir himſelf to ſave himſelf from it. This has been the practice of the godly in all ages of declining from the good ways of the Lord. So did Noah, Heb. xi. 7. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not ſeen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the ſaving of his houſe; by the which he condemned the world." And ſo did David, Pſalm xii. 1. "Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaſeth; for the faithful fail from among the children of men." And the neglect of this has been that which has led ſo many of the godly in all ages, into ſeveral ſteps of the way of the untoward generation. I never liked a public religion, that was all abroad, and nothing at home, taken up in cenſuring the faults of others, and putting the worſt face on them, and in the mean time not humbling themſelves and walking ſoftly under their own. But certainly thoſe whoſe lot it is to live in an untoward generation, had need to have their eyes in their head, and diſcern what corrupt courſes tend to, that they may beware of them.

2. He muſt look above him unto God, and take notice, how the courſe of the untoward generation is diſpleaſing

diſpleaſing to him; how he is thereby diſhonoured, and robbed of his glory, that is due to his name; how he is angry with the generation; and what ſigns of his wrath do appear, Pſalm lxix. 9. Hab. iii. 16. Mat. xvi. 3. God is the governor of the world, and he is not an idle ſpectator of what men do on earth: ſince he looks to us, let us look up to him

3. He muſt look within him, and behold what untowardneſs is within his own heart, and appears in his own life and way, Iſaiah vi. 5. Never man ſhall ſave himſelf from an untoward generation, that does not begin here. Here he muſt look, and behold how he is in danger of being led aſide into the way of the untoward generation, by reaſon of the blindneſs of mind, and untowardneſs of heart and affections within his own breaſt.

More particularly, if you would ſave yourſelves from an untoward generation,

1. Return unto God by Jeſus Chriſt, in the way of the everlaſting covenant held out to you in the goſpel: For "the promiſe is unto you, and to your children and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God ſhall call, Acts ii. 39." Be no longer ſtiff-necked, but yield yourſelves to the Lord. Take ſalvation clotely to heart now at length, and enter into the covenant, ye that are yet ſtrangers to Chriſt. And renew your covenant, ye that are the friends of Chriſt, give a new ſolemn conſent to the marriage-covenant betwixt Chriſt and your ſouls. And I would adviſe both to do this, with a particular view to your being ſaved from this untoward generation. Sirs, we ſeem to be entering into a cloud, and darkneſs ſeems to be coming on: take hold of Chriſt for your guide in time, leſt ye be wrapt up in the clour without a guide, and there be a ſad account of you, and ſuch as you are, ere the darkneſs be over.

2. Endeavour cloſe walking with God in your perſonal capacity, as did Noah, Gen vi. 9. forecited. Strive to be acquainted with religion in the life and

power of it on your own ſouls. In a dark and cloudy day upon the church, it is hard to keep faſt an unfelt religion. When the winds of error and deluſion are left to blow, the earth, ſea, and trees, there is a ſad account of them, Rev. vii 3. And in a time of common calamity, one that cannot live by faith, will find it hard to live.

3. Beware of and ſtand at a diſtance from the ſinful ways and courſes of the untoward generation: Eph. v. 11. "Have no fellowſhip with the unfruitful works of darkneſs, but rather reprove them." They that will partake of their ſins, muſt lay their account to partake of their plagues alſo, when God riſeth up to plead his controverſy. Let it not encourage you to ſin, that you ſee others generally take a liberty to themſelves that way; for by that means you enter into the conſpiracy againſt God with the multitude, and ſhall ſmart with them. If ever you ſave yourſelves from this untoward generation, you will be inſtructed of God as he was, that he "ſhould not walk in the way of this people," Iſ. viii. 11.

4. Mourn over the ſins of the untoward generation, as well as over your own, otherwiſe ye are not free of them, Ezek. ix. 4. foreeited. Pſal. cxix. 136. "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, (ſaid David:) becauſe they (the wicked) keep not thy law." Alas! this public ſpirit is much gone in our day. God is diſhonoured, his name is profaned, his ways, truths, and ordinances are trampled upon by an untoward generation; and we ſtand by as unconcerned ſpectators, or elſe join in the affronting of him. Ah! is God our Father? is Chriſt our elder brother? are we on Heaven's ſide? and can we be thus hale-hearted in ſuch a caſe?

5. Laſtly, Take home Zion's caſe into your own ſoul; and be concerned how it ſhall fare with the church and intereſt of Chriſt in this untoward generation. There has been much contending in Scotland even unto blood for all the parts of our covenanted

nanted reformation. Few of that generation are to the fore now; but we are arisen a new generation that knew not Joseph, and it is like to go to wreck among our hands. And it is much to be lamented, that professors generally are very easy and secure upon the matter. They see not the danger, they perceive not the weight of the thing, and they will not inquire into it. And hence no wonder, that they are not employed to wrestle with God upon it. But this is a day, that calls you to bestir yourselves on Zion's behalf, and inquire into and inform yourselves of her true interests, and the weight of them which are at stake; lest ye lay yourselves open to that, Amos vi. 1. "Wo to them that are at ease in Zion." Our Lord takes notice how men carry themselves in a time of his interest sinking, and will see to it himself in due time; but their case is dangerous who stand aloof from it, according to what Mordecai told Esther, chap iv. 14. "For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed."

III. I shall conclude with some motives to stir you up to save yourselves from this untoward generation.

1. The danger of this untoward generation is very great; Amos iii. 2. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." For the debt of sin they have entered heirs to, the breach of covenant with God, the blood of the saints, and apostasy of the late times, is very great and hainous. The multiplied causes of God's controversy, since the Lord returned the captivity of this church, are very many and of a deep die. And the stroke has been long threatened, and of divers kinds, sword, famine, and pestilence. So that in the ordinary course of providence it cannot miss to be of extreme weight when it comes.

2. It seems to be making haste, and to be very near,

near, Deut. xxxii. 35. "Their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste." For we see that God is risen up from this place, to punish the nations for their iniquity, in the pestilence that has so long raged abroad. It is time for us to bestir ourselves to save ourselves from this untoward generation, when our neighbours house is on fire. Besides, this untoward generation are visibly mending their pace in departing from God, and are making still quicker and quicker dispatch in filling up the cup of our iniquity. And as natural motions increase the more, the nearer they draw to the centre, so the nearer nations are to the fatal day of wrath, they make the greater speed in pulling it down on themselves. And finally, our divisions speak it to be so: "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

3. Lastly, Now is the time to save yourselves. God is yet on a throne of grace. He is calling to you, however far ye have gone on with the untoward generation, now to save yourselves from this untoward generation.

Iſrael's Sin and Judgment, with regard to abuſed Mercies, deſcribed.

A

SERMON

Preached at ETTRICK, November 7. 1725.

HOSEA ii. 8, 9.

For ſhe did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her ſilver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the ſeaſon thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedneſs.

IN theſe words we have Iſrael's ſin and judgment.

I. Iſrael's ſin, want of knowledge; a ſin, though but a want. Men muſt reckon to God for the gifts and graces they want, which they are obliged to have, and may have. A heart-ſin: the ſins of the heart, as well as thoſe of the life, are running; and a dark heart, as well as a heart rebelling againſt the light, is dangerous. In Iſrael's ſin obſerve two things.

1. The object they did not know. In a word, the divine bounty. God had been very kind to them, but they had taken no knowledge of all his kindneſs: they were more brutiſh than the ox or aſs, Iſ. i. 3. Obſerve,

(1.) The good things he had furniſhed them with and firſt for the body. [1.] Neceſſaries, *corn*, whereof their bread was made, uſuall put for all neceſſa-

ries.

ries. He had watched over the ſeaſons from the time it was ſown, till it was gathered in. [2.] Conveniencies; for delight, *wine*: he bleſſed their vintage. For ornament, oil, that makes the face to ſhine, and which was uſual in their feaſts, Pſal. xxiii. Secondly, for the purſe and coffer. 1ſt, A variety of coin of the beſt, ſilver and gold. 2dly, He made it increaſe, Heb. He bleſſed them in trade, they flouriſhed in it; the produce of their country did thrive, and brought in to them good prices for their commodities; ſo that they were a rich people. Thus they were in the reign of Jeroboam the Second, the moſt flouriſhing time they ever had, 2 Kings xiv. But what did they with it? They prepared it for their idol; they dreſſed Baal's image with it.

(2.) On what terms they were thus furniſhed; on free coſt their country was nouriſhed, God gave them theſe things freely. They had them by free gifts.

(3.) His liberality. They ſaid, ver. 5. their idols gave them bread. Suppoſe it had been ſo, God gave them corn, that was more. Their idols gave them water, but God gave them wine. And he added ſilver and gold, of which there is no mention in that verſe. So God had been kinder to them than their idols.

2. How they did not know this; *For*, Heb. *And*. It is joined with ver. 5. "She had played the harlot, done ſhamefully, and did not know." They laid it not to heart, and practiſed accordingly, to ſerve and honour God with his own good gifts, but ſerved their own luſts and idols with them, and diſhonoured him thereby. Thus though they knew that God gave them theſe things, in a general ſuperficial way, God reckons they did not know.

II. Iſrael's judgement; which is propoſed,

1. More generally. Where we have, (1.) The heavy turn brought on their condition, "I will return," *i. e.* change the way of my diſpenſation to them. As if he had ſaid, Whereas ye had both neceſſaries and

conveniencies for the body, I will ſtrip you of them both. Your purſes that were filled, I will empty them again; your trade that flouriſhed, I will blaſt, and ye ſhall go as faſt down as ever ye roſe. Ye ſhall have few penny-worths, and what ye have ye ſhall get little for them. (2.) The reaſon of it, *therefore*. God will not change his kind way with a people, but for good reaſon: ſo when we ſee it ſo with us, let us, ſatisfy ourſelves, that there is a cauſe: and juſtify God in the blackeſt turn of our lot. In this *therefore*,

1ſt. There is judgment and indignation. It refers to their ſin, ver. 8. "They knew not that I gave them: therefore I will return, and take them away." They have made an ill uſe of their plentiful proviſion; therefore I will draw their table, and bind them up to ſhort commons.

2dly, There is mercy and love in it. It refers alſo to ver. 6, 7. God ſhews there he had a deſign of love on them, to have them back to himſelf. That they may be made to turn, "therefore I will return:" their plenty has been their ſnare, therefore I will take it from them, that I may win them back again.

2. More particularly. He threats that he will leave them neither in them, nor on them; but ſtrip them of all. And,

1ſt, Of their maintenance; where obſerve, (1.) He aſſerts his property in their corn and wine: The corn they have is my corn, the wine my wine, though you call it yours, ver. 5. Though ye have ſown the corn, and planted the vines; and they are come forward to the time of eating and drinking of them.

(2.) He threatens to ſeize them accordingly as his own, "I will take away my corn," &c. And who can quarrel his taking away his own? (3.) The timing of the ſtroke. He will let alone the corn till it be come to the hook, yea, till it be for leading in, and then he will come and take it away in the time thereof, when nothing remains but for the huſbandman to [illegible]

joy the fruit of his labour. So he will take away the wine in its ſeaſon, when it is juſt ready for the preſs.

2dly, Of their cloathing. Where obſerve, (1.) His property in the wool and lint. (2.) For what end he gave them them. (3.) How he will take them away; recover them as out of the hand of enemies, wrongous poſſeſſors, that fed their luſts with them, but they ſhall not have them to cover their nakedneſs.

"Therefore I will return, and take away corn—and my wine—."

Three doctrines may be obſerved from theſe words.

Doct. I. "God will certainly change his way with proſperous impenitent ſinners."

Doct. II. "God's taking away the corn, and depriving men of the uſe of neceſſaries, is the juſt reward of the abuſe of plenty."

Doct. III. "God may have a deſign of love in taking away his corn from a ſinful people, and depriving them of ſuch neceſſary mercies and comforts of life."

I ſhall explain each of theſe doctrines, and apply them in order.

Doct. I. "God will certainly change his way with proſperous impenitent ſinners: therefore I will return." They may proſper for a while; but if they return not in the way of duty to God, God will return in the change of his diſpenſation to them, making their ſun to go down at noon-day with them.

The reaſons of this diſpenſation are,

1. God's honour requires it, Pſalm l. 21. "Theſe things haſt thou done, and I kept ſilence: thou thoughteſt that I was altogether ſuch a one as thyſelf: but I will reprove thee, and ſet them in order before thine eyes." He has tried them with proſperity, and that will not do; he will vindicate his own honour, by taking a

contrary course, that all the world may see he does not approve their way.

2. It is necessary to put a stop to their progress in wickedness. Wicked men, the more prosperous they are, the more vile they grow; like a dunghill, the hotter the sun shines on it, the ranker does it smell. Prosperity to them is as the wind to the seas; the stronger it blows, the waves rage the more: therefore he will bound it.

Use. 1. Let not prosperity make you forget God, yourselves, and duty; and trust not in the uncertain smiles of the world. For the frowns may yet be as heavy, as ever the smiles were pleasant, and things may go as fast wrong as ever they went right.

2. Let no body envy prosperous wickedness, Psalm xxxvii. 1. "Fret not thyself because of evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity." It has put good men sore to it, to behold despisers of God and godliness caressed by outward providence. But look to the world, and behold the end; that will be bitter, Psalm lxxiii. 17, 18.

Doct. II. *God's taking away the corn, and depriving men of the use of necessaries, is the just reward of the abuse of plenty.* This will appear, if ye consider,

1. That God is a God delighting in mercy, and does not willingly afflict, Lam. iii. 33. There is no delight in the misery of his creatures to him, Ezek. xviii. 23. Justice is his act indeed, but his strange act. It is with a kind of reluctancy that he reaches a stroke to his people, Hosea xi. 8.

2. He has promised the contrary course to his people walking in his ways, Hosea ii. 21, 22. "And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth, and the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil, and they shall hear Jezreel." It is a general promise, "To him that hath shall be given," namely,

The

The honouring of God with what we have is the way to get more; Prov. iii 9, 10. "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thine increase: so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."

Object. But do not even the godly tender ones smart in such a case? Ans. Indeed common calamities on a land or country do not just select the ungodly, and keep off from godly tender Christians: yet the latter have the advantage. There is as much guilt on the best, even of abuse of mercies, as will justify God in reaching them a share of the common calamity; but they shall get it moderated and sanctified, and God will bring good out of it to them, Psalm xxxvii. 19. "They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied." Verse 3. "Trust in the Lord, and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." Noah's house and land was overflown with the flood, but God provided him an ark. Jeremiah and his remnant were to fall into the enemy's hand, but the Lord said to him, "Verily it shall be well with thy remnant, verily I will cause the enemy to entreat thee well in the time of evil, and in the time of affliction," Jeremiah xv. 11.

3 He has threatened to punish the abuse of plenty with the want of necessaries, Deut. xxviii. 47, 48. "Because thou servedest not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things: therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he has destroyed thee." Thus he dealt with a sinning people, Amos iv. 6. "I have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places." The sins of a people in a foregoing time, often bring the harvest to a sorry account, Isaiah xvi. 9. "Therefore I will bewail with the weeping of Jezer, the vine of Sibmah: I will water thee with my tears O Heshbon,

O Heſhbon, and Elealeh: for the ſhouting for thy ſummer-fruits, and for thy harveſt, is fallen." Chapter xvii. 11. "In the day ſhalt thou make thy plant to grow, and the morning ſhalt thou make thy ſeed to flouriſh: but the harveſt ſhall be a heap in the day of grief, and of deſperate ſorrow." And as we hear from the word, ſo we behold it with our eyes at this day.

Object. But theſe things fall out of courſe; and there have been bad ſeaſons before this, and will be after too.

Anſ. There has ſo; but I know no body who pretends to have ſeen ſuch a long and ſore courſe of it at once. Howbeit God has the management of all, and known to him are all things from the beginning; and he has ſo ordered the courſe of nature, as to ſerve the purpoſe of fulfilling his word thereby: ſo that wind and rain are all let out by his order for that end, Job xxxvii. 12, 13.

Laſtly, It is the taking away from ſinners that which they have uſed to the diſhonour of God; and who beholds not that to be moſt juſt? The corn is the Lord's it is given to the children of men, that they may be thereby ſtrengthened to ſerve the Giver; and inſtead of that they ſerve their luſts with it.

USE. Let this ſerve,

1. To convince us of our abuſe of former mercies, being the cauſe of this heavy ſtroke in the caſe of the harveſt. There have been good years; but what wonder the Lord return, conſidering the unfruitfulneſs under the goſpel, abuſe of God's good creatures, carnality and worldineſs, &c.?

2. To humble us as a people againſt whom the Lord is thus teſtifying his diſpleaſure, as againſt abuſers of his goodneſs.

3. To put us to juſtify God, and not to fret. He is juſt in all that he has done; for we have ſinned.

Laſtly, To ſtir us up to repentance, to turn to a ſmiting God; that we be not as thoſe who refuſe correction.

DOCT.

DOCT. III. "God may have a deſign of love in taking away his corn from a ſinful people, and depriving them of ſuch neceſſary mercies and comforts of life."

1. In the general, that deſign is to cauſe them to return to the Lord the firſt huſband. When the Lord was to bring back Iſrael to himſelf for her adulterous departures, ſhe is ſtraitened in her proviſion, Hoſea iii. 2, 3. The ſtraits which the prodigal met with abroad, occaſioned his coming home, Luke xv. And this ſtroke is a call to us to return to our God.

2. More particularly, we may conceive that deſign to be,

(1.) To teach ſinners dependence on God in their affairs of life, Pſalm cxxvii. 1. "Except the Lord build the houſe, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." Men may plough, and ſow, and be at all pains, and yet not be ſecure of the crop; for God can make the harveſt a heap. Therefore learn that it is the Lord, and not your wit and induſtry, that gives power to get wealth.

(2.) To cut off from them fewel for their luſts, Hoſea ii. 6. "I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that ſhe ſhall not find her paths." Abundance has been a ſnare to many. And the beſt have ſo little ſkill to guide wealth, that it is God's goodneſs to many, they are held ſhort by the head. We are often with the comforts of the world, like a child playing himſelf with a knife: he weeps as herried, when it is taken away; but it is the father's kindneſs to the child, that he will not let him keep it.

3. To bring them to be more about the throne of grace by prayer, and to live more by faith. When the ſtreams run full, and there is wealth in the ciſterns, we are apt to forget the fountain: ſo God dries up the ſtreams, gives one ciſtern a crack after another, and it runs out, and then the ſoul comes away to God for all, Zeph. iii. 12. "I will leave in the midſt of thee an afflicted

afflicted and poor people, and they ſhall truſt in the name of the Lord." 1 Tim. v. 5. So their ſouls proſper, though the world proſpers not with them; while the proſperity of others deſtroys their ſouls.

4. To enrich them another way, Rom. v. 3, 4, 5. "Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not aſhamed." The wilderneſs-lot is oft-times the moſt profitable part of the Chriſtian's lot in the world. The moſt pathetic moving pſalms of David were penned on ſuch occaſions. The wilderneſs is often God's cloſet, which he takes his people into, Hoſea ii. 14. "I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderneſs, and ſpeak comfortably unto her, or to her heart." And ſome ſharp trial is the ſignal given them to come into the cloſet. The Lord brings them into ſtraits, that he may have occaſion to ſhew them his love in ſeaſonable reliefs, and that he may entertain them with the ſweet of the promiſes framed for their lot.

Uses. 1. Entertain kindly thoughts of the diſpenſations of this day, in the Lord's ſo far taking away the corn. The patient believes that the phyſician, in opening a vein and taking away ſo much blood, and in adminiſtering a bitter potion of phyſic to him, has no ill deſign on him: the toward child believes the father means no ill, but good to him, in correcting him. Why ſhould we entertain harſh thoughts of God, in his taking away outward comforts of life? Surely he ſees need for it. Without theſe kindly thoughts of the divine providence, there is no good of the trial.

2. Comply with the kind deſign of providence. Learn dependence on God, mortify your luſts, live by faith, and ſee to make ſpiritual advantage of the diſpenſation. Return quickly to God who ſmiteth, and humble yourſelves under the mighty hand: and if ye be loſers one way, we will be ſure to be gainers another.

Laſtly, Rejoice in the Lord, when the creatures fail

fail. This was Habakkuk's exerciſe, and it ought to be yours, chapter iii. 17, 18. "Although the fig-tree ſhall not bloſſom, neither ſhall fruit be in the vines: the labour of the olive ſhall fail, and the fields ſhall yield no meat, the flock ſhall be cut off from the fold, and there ſhall be no herd in the ſtalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my ſalvation."

"I will take away——in the time thereof——in the ſeaſon thereof."

Doct. "God often ſees it meet to take away temporal mercies, juſt when they are brought to the point of enjoyment." As if one ſhould cauſe the bread to fall out of one's hand, when he is juſt putting it in his mouth. Remarkable to this purpoſe is Hoſea ix. 2. "The floor and the wine-preſs ſhall not feed them, and the new wine ſhall fail in her." Thus has he done in our caſe. He does it,

Reaſ. 1. To make the trial ſtrike the more home, Job xx. 22. "In the fulneſs of his ſufficiency, he ſhall be in ſtraits." The higher men's hopes are lifted up, the more piercing is the diſappointment. Secure ſinners need a ſharp awakening, and God points afflictions this way, that they may be the more rouſing. The more the mercy is ripened, the loſs is the ſorer, and the trial the greater.

2. To teach us that we are always in his reverence, and all we have is at all times in his hand, Hoſea ix. 11, 12. "As for Ephraim, their glory ſhall fly away like a bird; from the birth, and from the womb, and from the conception. Though they bring up their children, yet will I bereave them that there ſhall not be a man left: yea, woe alſo unto them when I depart from them." What we have we can ſometimes put out of the reach of men our enemies; but nothing we have can we put of God's reach. Therefore

there

there is as much need of dependence on God, for the corn when it comes to the hook, as when it is sown first.

3. To punish men's carnal confidence upon fair appearances. When the creature blooms fair, men promises themselves mighty things on the head of it, without dependence on God: and then a jealous God strikes it down therefore in his wrath, Luke xii. 20. "Thou fool, (said God unto the rich man) this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" This is applicable to the affair of the blasted crop. It may bud and blossom fair whose fruit may be blasted, Hosea viii. 7. "They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the stranger shall swallow it up."

Lastly, There may be some new provocation, between the first appearance and bringing of the mercy to perfection, which may procure a turn of the wheel of providence. Hence said the Lord to Eli, 1 Sam. ii. 30. "I said indeed, that thy house, and the house of thy father should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me, I will honour, and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed." O how often do we by our miscarriages stop the course of our mercies! Things go favourably a while: but when men forget God, and forget themselves, God is provoked to give a backward cast.

USE. 1. See here the uncertainty of all temporal things. One is never sure of them: there is not one stage of all the way they come to us, but they may fail in it, and never rise again, Hosea ix. 11. forecited. In the bud, blossom, and fruit too, they are liable to blasting. When they are at their full, they may suddenly suffer an eclipse.

2. Be not secure when the world smiles: though it smile this moment, it may look sour the next. In the midst of its triumphs one may be knocked down.

Therefore

Therefore rejoice with trembling: for often when affliction ſeems fartheſt off, the hand is only lifted back to fetch the greater ſtroke; Job xxi. 13 "They ſpend their days in wealth, in a moment go down to the grave."

3. How much more deſirable and valuable are the ſpiritual mercies of peace with God, pardon, and eternal life? Theſe are things one may be ſure of; the world cannot take them away, and God will not; "For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance," Rom. xi. 29. Temporal mercies are a crown that common providence may ſet on with its hand to-day, and kick off with its foot to-morrow. But ſpiritual privileges are liable to no ſuch uncertainties, Matth. vi. 19. 20. "Lay not up for yourſelves treaſures upon earth, where moth and ruſt doth corrupt, and were thieves break through and ſteal. But lay up for yourſelves treaſures in heaven, where neither moth nor ruſt doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor ſteal."

4. Let not God's people loſe their hope and confidence in God for a delivery, when their caſe is even come to an extremity. There is a counter-part of this diſpenſation, which the people of God often meet with, Deut. xxxii. 36. "For the Lord ſhall judge his people, and repent himſelf for his ſervants; when he ſeeth that their power is gone, and there is none ſhut up, or left. It is as eaſy for God to turn the wheel of providence the one way as the other; to make night day, as day night; to make the ſun ariſe at midnight, as to go down at mid-day, Zech. xiv. 7.

Laſtly, Sit looſe to the world: neither be caſt down with its frowns, nor lifted up with its ſmiles; but lay your weight on Chriſt, truſting in him alone for all things.

"I will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedneſs."

DOCT. "God's taking away outward mercies from the abuſers of them, is a recovering them out of their hand."

1. It imports, that they have forfeited their right to them, and are in a ſenſe violent poſſeſſors of them; that a ſtronger than they muſt recover them out of their hands. Wicked men have no covenant-right to the creatures: but God gives them a providential right to them; and even that they forfeit before the Lord by their abuſe of them.

2. The creatures are unwillingly detained by them, and groan to be recovered out of their hands, Romans viii. 20, 21. The creatures were made for the honour of God, but wicked men uſe them as inſtruments to diſhonour God with: therefore they groan as captives and priſoners to be delivered out of their hands. Their corn groans from their fields and barns, their drink from their cups, their ſilver and gold from their pockets, for that they ſhould be uſed for the maintenance of their luſts: and the godly expreſs their groans at the mouth of the creation, Romans viii. 22, 23. "For we know that the whole creation groaneth, and travaileth in pain together until now: and not only they, but ourſelves alſo, which have the firſt fruits of the Spirit, even we ourſelves groan within ourſelves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."

3. Abuſed mercies are ſtill the Lord's; let men uſe them as they will, God has not given up his property in them: "My corn, wool," &c. Men are apt to think that they may do with their own what they will; but mind, nothing is yours, but in ſubordination to God. And therefore ye muſt give account to God how ye diſpoſe of every meaſure of your corn, and cup of your drink, every penny of your ſilver and gold: and as much of theſe as has been laid out in the ſervice of your luſts, ye ſhall be made to ſuffer for, as unjuſt ſtewards that have waſted your Maſters goods.

La-

Laſtly, He will take them in again to his own hand, to diſpoſe of them another way. They are never out of his reach: he can ſtrip thoſe of them in life, make wings to them, and cauſe them fly away, and leave them nothing, who ſometimes had an affluence of all things, whereof every age affords many inſtances. He will ſurely ſtrip them of them at death, and haſten on their dying day, for to recover his mercies out of their hands, Jer. xvii. 11. "As the partridge ſitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not: ſo he that geteth riches, and not by right, ſhall leave them in the midſt of his days, and at his end ſhall be a fool.

USE. Let abuſers of God's goodneſs hold as faſt as they can, their abuſed mercies will be ſure to leave them, leaving a ſting behind them. Since God takes it on him to recover them, he will do it effectually at length: and ſince he will take them from them, by way of recovery, there is a piercing ſting that the removal will leave behind it. The rich man in hell had not a drop of water to cool his tongue: the wine he drank plentifully in his faring deliciouſly every day, made this more bitter. It is not ſo with the godly loſing their creature-comforts in the midſt of their ſober uſe of them, as Job vi. 13.

"For ſhe did not know that I gave her corn," &c.

DOCT. "God takes it hainouſly that men ſhould not know and conſider themſelves to be his debtors for their meat, drink, and money, but ſhould lay them out on their luſts and idols."

This imports theſe things.

1. Men need theſe things, in this their imperfect ſtate in this world. Therefore we are taught to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." In heaven the ſaints will need none of them: in hell they will not get a drop of water, however much they need it. Here we

muſt have meat and drink for the ſupport of our bodies: and money is neceſſary for conveniency of life, Eccl. x. 19. "Money anſwereth all things."

2. God is the giver of them, the meat, the drink, the money. They are all his. So the text, "My corn, my wine," &c. Hag. ii. 8. "The ſilver is mine, and the gold is mine, ſaith the Lord of hoſts." And he gives them to whom, and in what meaſure he ſees good, James i. 17. "Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Though men earn them by their labour and induſtry, though they be left them by parents or other friends, God is ſtill the giver, as being the firſt cauſe, without whom all other could do nothing.

3. God requires men to conſider themſelves as his debtors for all, and to behave themſelves accordingly, uſing them all for his honour. This is the burden he affects his gifts with, Prov. iii. 9. "Honour the Lord with thy ſubſtance, and with the firſt-fruits of all thine increaſe." And according as he gives, ſo he requires a proportionable improvement, Luke xix. 13. "Occupy till I come." The more liberally God beſtows on any, the more are they obliged to be uſeful for God, Luke xii. 48. "For unto whomſoever much is given, of him ſhall be much required."

4. Notwithſtanding corrupt men beſtow God's good gifts on their luſts, James iv. 3. By theſe they feed them, protect and defend them againſt God and his holy law. The meat, drink, and money, are employed that way. One feeds with them a luſt of gluttony, another that of drunkenneſs, another a luſt of pride and vanity. Many that have the greateſt abundance of them ſpend them on harlots. So by this means they proclaim war againſt God, and carry it on againſt him with weapons got out of his own magazine, James iv. 4.

5. It is owing to means not conſidering that they are God's debtors for theſe things, that they dare venture to beſtow them on their luſts. If they laid to heart

them

their dependence on him for all they have, they would not dare to uſe them to the diſhonour of the giver; knowing that he whoſe plenty they abuſe, can ſoon bring them to the lack of neceſſaries.

6. Laſtly, This is highly provoking in the ſight of God. We can make him no recompenſe for his mercies, but ſhall we not acknowledge the receipt of them? What he gives us for our neceſſity and conveniency, ſhall we uſe to the diſhonour of his name? "Do ye thus requite the Lord, O fooliſh people and unwiſe?" Deut. xxxii. 6.

Use. 1. See here the true cauſe of the preſent ſtroke; how trade comes to be ſo low, money ſcarce, and the corns many of them ſo far ruined. We have not known that God gave us corn, and wine, and oil, &c.

2. Be warned then to conſider, that ye are God's debtors for your meat, drink, and money; and, under the pain of God's high diſpleaſure, ceaſe to conſume them on your luſts. Provoke him not to jealouſy, as if ye were ſtronger than he: for there will be a bitter reckoning for mercies ſo abuſed.

God's Diſpenſations towards a froward Generation deſcribed.

A

SERMON

Preached at ETTRICK, March 13. 1728, on a Faſt-day appointed by the Preſbytery of Selkirk.

DEUTERONOMY XXXII. 20.

And he ſaid, I will hide my face from them, I will ſee what their end ſhall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith.

THIS ſong, after the introduction, ver. 1.—6. ſets forth God's ſpecial favours to Iſrael in ancient and later times, verſe 7.—14. Iſrael's ingratitude to and apoſtaſy from God, verſe 15.—18. He inſtances particularly in their ſenſuality and idolatry. Then follows God's juſt reſentment of their apoſtaſy. Inſtead of delighting in them, he diſdains them; inſtead of his former favours to them, he will turn away from them and leave them.

In the words we have two things.

1. A reſolution taken in heaven againſt them, "And he ſaid, I will hide my face from them;" and what God ſays muſt ſtand, he will not unſay it again. And two things he is reſolved on againſt them.

(1.) That he "will hide his face from them," Heb. "cauſe to hide," pointing at a vail he would draw between him and them, which they ſhould not be able to remove. His hiding his face from them, is the withdrawing

withdrawing of the tokens of his favours, and his refuſing them his countenance, as one wroth with them.

(2.) That he would ſee and obſerve what their end or latter part would be. The former part of their time had been a time of much kindneſs ſhewn to them from God, and baſe ingratitude to God in them. Now he reſolves to withdraw his favours, let them alone, and ſee what they will make of the latter part, and proceed with them accordingly.

2. The reaſons juſtifying this reſolution.

(1.) They were a froward generation, very froward, a generation of perverſeneſſes; whatever way God would draw them, they would ſtill turn the contrary, and would not be managed.

(2.) They were a faithleſs generation; though children, and ſons, by an external federal adoption, there was no truſtineſs in them; they would ſay and unſay, no ties would bind them: they were falſe and fickle, and ſtill played faſt and looſe. The firſt reaſon ſeems ſpecially to relate to the firſt part of the reſolution; and the ſecond to the ſecond part of it.

We may take up the ſubſtance of theſe words in four points of doctrine.

Doct. I. "It may be the juſt character of a generation of the church, that they are a very froward generation."

Doct. II. "A holy God will hid his face from a froward generation."

Doct. III. "God, hiding his face from a froward generation, waits to ſee what iſſue they will bring it to, that he may take courſe with them accordingly."

Doct. IV. "What provokes God to deal thus with a generation, is their being children in whom is no faith, men profeſſing the true religion, and yet ſo falſe as that they are not to be truſted."

I ſhall endeavour to explain and apply each of theſe doctrines in order.

Doct. I.

DOCT. I. "It may be the juſt character of a generation of the church, that are a very froward generation." This is the juſt character,

1. Of a generation deaf to the calls of the word, not to be wrought upon by the offers of the goſpel nor the terrors of the law, Matth. xi. 17. God calls ſinners to turn from their ſin, holding out the arms of his mercy to embrace them: ſtretching out the flaming ſword of his juſtice to fright them; the one in the goſpel-promiſes the other in the law-threatenings. But they go on frowardly.

2. An incorrigible generation, whom the kindneſs of God in his providence to them will not draw to repentance, and who go on wilfully in their ſinful courſes over the belly of correction, and the rebukes of providence they meet with, Rom ii. 4. "Deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his goodneſs, and forbearance, and long-ſuffering, not knowing that the goodneſs of God leadeth thee to repentance?" Jer. v. 3. "Thou haſt ſtricken them, but they have not grieved; thou haſt conſumed them, but they have refuſed to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock, they have refuſed to return." In the one, ſinners deſpiſe his favour; in the other they defy his feud. Let him ſay and do what he will to them, they will have their ſwing, coſt what it will, Jer. ii. 25. "I have loved ſtrangers, and after them will I go."

3. A generation impatient of check and control, Hoſea iv. 4. "Let no man ſtrive, nor reprove another: for thy people are as they that ſtrive with the prieſt." They ſcorn to be hedged in within the bounds ſet them by the law of God: the more they are ſtriven againſt, the more do their luſts rage, the more are their corruptions irritated. To offer to dam them up, is to provoke them in effect to go from evil to worſe; their wickedneſs comes down like an overflowing flood.

4. A generation turning its edge againſt truth and holineſs; being ſet nor only to take their will in their own

own courſes, but to run down religion, and what has the ſtamp of divine approbation on it, Luke xi. 52 "Wo unto you, lawyers: for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourſelves, and them that were entering in, ye hindered." Not only they will not be managed themſelves by the divine counſel, but they wage war againſt truth and ſerioufneſs, that they may get them driven out from the generation.

USE. And is not this the juſt character of the preſent generation? How fruitleſs is the preaching of the goſpel among us? how little valued are the terrors of the law? The kind caſts of providence in ſignal deliverances, the awful rebukes of providence which the land and particular perſons have ſmarted under, are both neglected. The generation in church and ſtate, in congregations and families, are paſt ſtriving with in hopes of any amendment, Hoſ. iv. 4. foreſeited. Secret ſighing and mourning over the caſe before the Lord, is the great thing that is left for Zion's mourners, Jer. xiii. 17. "But if ye will not hear it, my ſoul ſhall weep in ſecret places for your pride, and mine eyes ſhall weep ſore, and run down with tears." And truth and holineſs is run down with error and profaneneſs. The precious truths of the goſpel are reproached and deſpiſed; and while there is an inundation of immorality in practice, there is a bringing in a Chriſtleſs morality in doctrine, inſtead of the glorious goſpel of the grace of God. What is to be expected of theſe things? Why,

DOCT. II. *A holy God will hide his face from a froward generation.* This ſpeaks two things.

1. God's diſpleaſure with ſuch a generation, Iſaiah lvii. 17. "For the iniquity of his covetouſneſs was I wroth, and ſmote him: I hide me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart." However they may be pleaſed with themſelves and their own condition, God is greatly diſpleaſed with them; and

and they will find it to their coſt at long-run. A froward generation is a generation of God's wrath. Men may put fair colours on their apoſtaſy, to bring themſelves and others into a liking of their courſes; but God will not be mocked.

2. God's diſdain and loathing of ſuch a generation, Deut. xxxii. 19, 20. "And when the Lord ſaw it, he abhorred them, becauſe of the provoking of his ſons, and of his daughters. And he ſaid, I will hide my face from them, I will ſee what their end ſhall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith." Sinners pride themſelves in their abominations, as if they would cope with heaven; but God diſdains them as contemptible wretches, whom he can in a moment cruſh in pieces. They pleaſe themſelves wallowing in the mire of their courſe of apoſtaſy; but God loaths them as abominable in his eyes.

And it imports two things.

1. His withdrawing the former tokens of his favour from them; the light of his countenance that ſometimes ſhined, goes down on them; and the heavens lour on them, however earth may ſmile, Jeremiah xv. 9. "She that has born ſeven, languiſheth: ſhe has given up the ghoſt, her ſun is gone down while it was yet day." Heaven's favour and ſmiles put a crown on the head of a generation; but a froward generation, ungrateful for them, provokes God to put a ſtop to the courſe of them.

2. His turning his back on them, departing, and forſaking of them. A froward generation firſt turns their back on the Lord, neglecting to walk in his ways, Jeremiah ii. 27. "They have turned their back unto me, and not their face;" and then God pays them home in their own coin, turning his back of them, Jeremiah xviii. 17. "I will ſhew them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity." So that they have not the acceſs to him that they ſometimes had; nor does he appear for them, as ſometimes he did.

Use. Is not this the very caſe we are in at this day,

day, with reſpect to heaven? God has hid his face from the generation. He is evidently diſpleaſed with us, and loaths us. Where are the former tokens of his favour and preſence among us? — Look to ordinances, and our dead and lifeleſs aſſemblies; look to the ſeveral corners of the land, and the name of the whole may be "Ichabod, for the glory is departed." It has been theſe many years a-departing, and grows always leſs and leſs, departing farther and farther. And this brings me to,

DOCT. III. "God, hiding his face from a froward generation, waits to ſee what iſſue they will bring it to, that he may take courſe with them accordingly. I will ſee what their end will be."

This is a very heavy word, and implies three things.

1. God will give them head. They are froward, and will not be managed by him; he will not ſtrive with them as he has done, but he will give them head to take their courſe, and follow their mark, as he did with Iſrael of old, Pſalm lxxxi. 11, 12. "My people would not hearken to my voice: and Iſrael would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts luſt: and they walked in their own counſels." The farther ſinners go in apoſtaſy from God, they find their way the plainer, and not ſo many rubs in it as they met with at the firſt.

2. He will narrowly mark every ſtep that they take, when they have gotten their will, though he do not preſently tell them of it, nor ſtrive with them to hold them in, Amos viii. 7. "The Lord has ſworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works." They could not endure his being a monitor, and a reprover to them: he will let it alone, and be only a ſpectator, but not an idle ſpectator, but one that will lay up every article in order to count and reckoning in due time, Deut. xxxii. 34. 35. "Is not this laid up in ſtore with me, and ſealed up among my treaſures? To me belongeth vengeance, and recompenſe, their

their foot ſhall ſlide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that ſhall come upon them make haſte"

3. They will bring the matter at that rate to a miſerable iſſue, Iſaiah lvii. 17. forecited. They will go from evil to worſe. And ſo they did, till they crucified the Lord of glory, perſecuted his followers, and turned downright blaſphemers, and God rejected them and cut them off, Deut xxxii. 21. "They have moved me to jealouſy with that which is not God, they have provoked me to anger with their vanities; and I will move them to jealouſy with thoſe which are not a people, I will provoke them to anger with a fooliſh nation". Thus ſinners, having provoked God to give them head, go on to ſuch a pitch of apoſtaſy and wickedneſs, as will juſtify before all the moſt ſevere proceedings againſt them.

USE. Alas! this ſeems to be too like to be the caſe of this church and land at this day, and of many particular perſons in it. In former generations the Lord held his church ſhort by the head: and becauſe they could never hold right long, they got no long reſt ordinarily, but were thrown into the furnace to purge them. But now the reſt which this generation has got, is near on the borders of forty years; and we have been long going wrong, and ſtill our peace is preſerved: and always the longer the farther, and the caſe the more hopeleſs. So it looks as if God, having given the generation head, were even ſeeing what iſſue they will bring it to: And if it be ſo, God pity them that will live to ſee the end of it: for it will be dreadful firſt in the pitch that the apoſtaſy will be brought to, and the judgement which will follow it. And ſo will it be in the caſe of particular perſons.

DOCT. IV. "What provokes God to deal thus with a generation, is their being children in whom is no faith, men profeſſing the true religion, and yet ſo falſe

as that they are not to be truſted." This we may take up in theſe two things.

1. Their being men who cannot be bound to their duty by the moſt ſolemn and ſacred engagements, but ſay, "Let us break their bands aſunder, and caſt away their cords from us, Pſalm. ii. 3.

2. Perſons who, in their profeſſions of duty which they make, lie to God and man, will ſay well at a time, but in practice do not mind nor regard what they ſo ſaid; Jer. ii. 20. "Thou ſaidſt, I will not tranſgreſs: when upon every high hill, and under every green tree thou wandereſt, playing the harlot."

USE. Now whether God is ſeeing what our end will be, ſure this is the caſe of this generation, "children in whom is no faith." Our ſolemn national covenants with God, the conſcience of them is generally worn out at this day, and the ſacred ties of them are felt by very few, the ſenſe of them being deadened by contrary practices, laws, and oaths. Sacramental engagements to duty in our baptiſm and at the Lord's table, are too weak to bind moſt of thoſe that have taken them on a tolerable Chriſtian walk; but they carry as if they had been engaged to ſerve the devil, the world, and the fleſh. And with many marriage is but a jeſt, and their marriage-vows are to them but ropes of ſand, whence theſe lands are filled with vile adulteries. Men profeſs to know God, but in works they deny him. There is no truth left among men, and common honeſty is turned rare. There is no truſting of men's words or proteſtations, and hardly their oaths. The maſter cannot truſt the ſervant, nor can one neighbour truſt another; for it is rare to find a perſon, that will not ſacrifice truth and faithfulneſs to their own intereſt. So that the character of the generation may be, "Children in whom there is no faith." And what will the end of theſe things be?

The certain, though ſlow, Accompliſhment of threatened Judgments.

A

SERMON

Preached at ETTRICK, on a congregation Faſt day, February 26. 1720.

EZEKIEL xii. 23.

Say unto them, The days are at hand, and the effect of every viſion.

THIS is a meſſage from God, and a very heavy one, to the Jews, who being often threatened, and yet ſpared from time to time, were like to turn infidels to all Heaven's threatenings, and to make a jeſt of them. It conſiſts of two parts.

1. They were to be aſſured, that now at length the days of threatened wrath were at hand. "The days at hand," Heb. "have come near." Of theſe days four things are to be obſerved. (1.) They were days of wrath, wherein they were to get ſuch a ſtroke as they had never got ſince they ſettled in Canaan, viz. the deſtruction of Jeruſalem, and the laying the land deſolate of them by Nebuchadnezzar. Of theſe days they had long been forewarned, particularly by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. (2.) They had been long put off, from the time that the Lord began to threaten them; ſo long, that it was turned to a proverb, a profane jeſt, "The days are prolonged, (verſe 22. Heb.) will be long a-coming. There is no appearance of them, for all that the angry prophets

prophets are always ſaying, and all the noiſe they have made about them: if they come at all, and do not blow by, they are not like to come in our time. (3.) Though they were ſlow in their motion, they were neither ſlack nor ſleeping; they have come near, they have been ſtill advancing. (4.) Their preſent ſituation: they were now near at hand. If ye aſk, how near they were then? They were within three years of their beginning, Ezek. viii. 1. with 2 Kings xxv. 1. And that the Lord would have them to reckon near.

2. They were to be aſſured, that in theſe days all ſhould come on together; "And the effect of every viſion." It imports two things. (1.) That every viſion ſhould have an effect. The prophets had got ſeveral viſions of wrath on Jeruſalem, of war, famine, ſword, and captivity, which they had revealed to the people. But they were ſo long delayed as to accompliſhment, that they began to ſay, "Every viſion faileth," ver. 22. Now aſſure them, ſaith God, they ſhall every one have their accompliſhment, and not one of them miſcarry. (2.) That every viſion ſhould have an effect in theſe days, and ſo all theſe miſeries ſhould come on together: "The effect of every viſion is as at hand."

The ſubſtance of theſe words may be gathered up in the following doctrine.

DOCT. "Days of threatened wrath long delayed come near to breaking out at length, on an impenitent people; and when they do break out, they are very ſore, all coming on together."

For the firſt part of this doctrine, I ſhall,

I. Shew why days of threatened wrath are long delayed.

II. Conſider theſe days of threatened wrath coming near at length to breaking out on an impenitent people.

III. Apply.

I. I ſhall ſhew why days of threatened wrath are long delayed?

1. Becauſe the Lord will give ſinners ſpace to repent, 2 Pet. iii. 9. "The Lord is not ſlack concerning his promiſe, as ſome men count ſlackneſs: but is long-ſuffering to us-ward, not willing that any ſhould periſh, but that all ſhould come to repentance." The barren fig-tree, after the order to cut it down, gets another year's digging and dunging, Luke xiii. 8, 9. Who knows what a little ſpace may do to ſome, and what brands may be plucked out of the fire, while the Lord delays to ſtrike? The axe lay at the root of the tree of the Jewiſh church, from the death of Chriſt, forty years, ere it was cut down: and in that time many were converted, that would have been cut off in their ſin, had it come ſooner. It has been about as long ſince the revolution, and many have been brought to Chriſt during that period.

2. Some ſuch as will never be bettered, are ſpared for the ſake of elect ones in their loins. The generation that came out of Egypt were a generation of wrath, but God made not a full end of them, till there was a generation come of them that might poſſeſs the promiſed land. So the wrath may be delayed for the ſake of a generation yet unborn, as a woman with child is reprived on account of the fruit of her womb, Matth. xxiv. 22.

3. Becauſe the Lord may have ſome of his own to take out of harm's way before the ſtroke comes, Iſaiah lvii. 1. "The righteous periſheth, and no man layeth it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, none conſidering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come." The angel that came to deſtroy Sodom, could do nothing till Lot was in Zoar, Gen. xix. 22. Good Joſiah behoved to be out of the way before the Babyloniſh captivity; and Methuſelah before the deluge.

4. The Lord even grants ſomething to the prayers of his people in this caſe, Luke xiii. 8, 9. in the caſe of

of the barren fig-tree. Desolating strokes use not to come on, till there is a restraint of the Spirit of prayer, with the Lord's people, for averting the stroke.

5. Lastly, For the Lord's name's sake, Isaiah xlviii. 9. "For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off." He will have his proceeding against a sinful generation clear and unexceptionable: and the delay proclaims, God's patience and long-suffering, and leaves them inexcusable. The longer it is a-coming, God's patience appears the more.

II. We will consider these days of threatened wrath coming near at length to breaking out on an impenitent people. This implies,

1. That wrath delayed is not therefore laid aside. A generation continuing impenitent, keeps in the fire of wrath, that it goes not out, howbeit it is for a while kept back from consuming them. Sins national and personal are a debt that will not die out through time. Wrath hangs still in the threatening, as in a cloud that will break at length, if repentance prevent not.

2. Even while it is deferred, it is making speed forward, 2 Pet. ii. 3. "Their judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." The Lord sees impenitent sinners day coming, though they will not see it, Psalm xxxvii. 13. There is a time set for it as the due time, and no time is lost, whatever are the delays, but it makes haste, Deut. xxxii. 35. "Their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.

3. The longer they are delayed, they are the nearer hand; so that when the impenitent generation has most lost sight of them, they are hard at their heels, 1 Thess. v. 3. "For when they shall say, 'Peace and safety;' then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." So in the text, "The days are at hand, and the effect

of every viſion" For ſinners turn ſecure upon the delay; but in the mean time longer they have been borne with, they have the leſs reaſon to be ſecure. For,

1ſt, Such a caſe is a very deſperate caſe, God's forbearance leading men to a ſecure contempt of him, inſtead of repentance, Rom ii. 3. 4. Deſperate is the caſe when the remedy uſed ſerves but to increaſe the diſeaſe. That calls for cutting off.

2dly, Abuſed patience turns always to fury at length, Ezek. xxiv. 13. "In thy filthineſs is lewdneſs: becauſe I have purged thee, and thou waſt not purged, thou ſhalt not be purged from thy filthineſs any more, till I have cauſed my fury to reſt upon thee." It is dangerous to play with the patience of God; for fury will take its turn when men are not aware, and patience muſt end ſooner or later with them.

Laſtly, It is neceſſary for the honour of God. The world would turn downright Atheiſts, if God did not ſome time baffle their vain hopes of impunity, and ſhew that he has not forgot their miſdemeanors, Pſalm l. 21. "Thoſe things haſt thou done, and I kept ſilence: thou thoughteſt that I was altogether ſuch a one as thyſelf; but I will reprove thee, and ſet them in order before thine eyes." Pſalm lviii. *ult.* "Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth."

USE. As we have been long threatened with days of wrath that are ſtill delayed, while in the mean time the generation is going on impenitently in their courſe, we have ground to reckon that theſe days are come near at length to breaking out on us. There are four things that deſerve our ſerious conſideration here.

That it is long ſince there was a ſtanding controverſy with this land laid, which in the ordinary method of providence cannot miſs to be purſued with ſignal judgments. That was in the days of our fathers, when ſolemn national covenants for reform-

tion being entered into, with uplifted hands unto God, and reformation was accordingly advanced to a very conſiderable degree; they began at firſt to be falſe and fickle in God's covenant, and at length all of a ſudden, as if ſtruck with a frenzy from hell, they openly and avowedly broke and burnt their covenant with God, pulled down and razed their reformation, and for about twenty-eight years raged in oppreſſion, perſecution, blood, and death againſt thoſe who adhered thereto, and would not join them in their apoſtaſy. Reflecting on this we may ſay, "Shall not the Lord viſit for theſe things? Shall not his ſoul be avenged on ſuch a nation as this?" Jeremiah ix. 9. That controverſy has ſwept away the race of the name of our kings that did it, off the throne; it has turned our parliament that joined them with their authority, out of their houſe and honour, ſo that we have no more a Scots parliament either to do good or evil; and it is to be feared, it will ſoak our land and people in blood next in their turn.

2. I can ſay from perſonal knowledge, that, for more than forty years, the Lord has put it in the hearts and mouths of his miniſters, that that controverſy would be viſited on this land with fearful ſtrokes. And for all that is yet come and gone, the effect of theſe viſions ſeems not to be come yet. I own that what I heard many years ago of this nature, when miniſters had more of the Spirit with them than now, being brought out of a hot furnace of trial, has weight with me.

3. Often during that time, eſpecially within theſe twenty years, has the black cloud hovering over the head of this land, been at the point of breaking, and thowering down upon us; and yet has been either quite diſpelled without any ſcathe at all, or only with ſome drops falling, as in the caſe of the rebellion in 1715. By all which God has teſtified that he did not forget the controverſy, though time after time he has delayed the thorough pleading of it.

4. And

4. And now we have ſeveral ſhrewd ſymptoms that the days are near to break out upon us, to avenge the quarrel of his covenant upon a generation that have entered themſelves heirs to the iniquity of their fathers by a courſe of continued apoſtaſy.

It is childiſh and unſcriptural to ſay, that thoſe who entered into and ſo avowedly broke the covneant, are mouldy away now: what way can the controverſy affect us? For no generation can go back from purity and reformation attained by their fathers, but upon their peril; and ſo far as they inſiſt in the ſteps of their backſliding fathers, they juſtify them in their backſlidings, and ſo enter themſelves heirs to their ſin, and conſequently to their judgments. The covenant made with the Gibeonites in Joſhua's time, was binding in the days of Saul, and the ſlaughter made of them in the days of Saul contrary to that covenant, the land ſuffered for it many years after that in the latter end of David's reign, 2 Sam. xxi. The blood of Abel came on the generation that crucified Chriſt, Matth. xxiii. 35. and to the Jews in Jeremiah's days the Lord ſaith, "They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refuſed to hear my words, and they went after other gods to ſerve them; the houſe of Iſrael and the houſe of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers," Jer. xi. 10.

Sympt. 1. From fearful lengths of apoſtaſy in practice, the very principles of religion have got a rooſtſtroke in our day. Profaneneſs and immoralities have hugely increaſed to the filling of the land with oppreſſion and fraud, ſo that common honeſty is rare to be met with; with luxury, ſenſuality, ſwearing, perjury, till the ſenſe of oaths is like to wear out; with fornications, whoredoms, and adulteries, ſo that I doubt if marriage was ever ſo contemptuouſly treated in this land, with contempt of religion and ſerioufneſs, ſo that it is become faſhionable to deſpiſe it. Reformation is out of sight, head, and heart, and many a wound that work has got in our day: and it has proceeded to a calling

off the covenants for it in principle, and a casting dirt on the faces of our zealous forefathers, as unenlightened in the matter. Yea and the root of Christianity has been struck at, by calling in question the necessary existence and independency of Christ the great God our Saviour. It is true, our church has testified her displeasure with the men that have given these bold strokes: but they cease not for all that to be sad symptoms of wrath. So it was with the Jewish church before their destruction.

Sympt. 2. In the mean time the pillars of the land fail. Many mourners in Zion and wrestlers are taken away by death. The generation of professors is exceeding naughty, their conversation generally stumbling and offensive, fitted to expose religion to the contempt of others, and to fright them at it, turning religion into mere shew and talk, without any tolerable regard to the duties of morality; so that we may say, "O that I had wings like a dove, for then would I flee away, and be at rest; and, Oh, that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" And finally, there is a decay and damp on the spirits of the truly godly, that they are sighing and going backward, in worse case at this day to meet with trials than several years ago.

Sympt. ult. We are far on in the time of the delay, and the controversy is still standing and increasing. Therefore we may conclude, that "the days are near, and the effect of every vision."

The last branch of the doctrine is, "When threatened wrath long delayed does break out, the days of it are readily very sore, all coming on together." For,

1. The grounds of the controversy are always increasing with an impenitent people spared. As the snowball the farther it is rolled, and the water the farther it runs, is the bigger; so when all comes to be laid together, it makes swelling accounts.

2. As

2. As ſin increaſes wrath increaſes, Rom. ii. So the longer judgment is a-coming, it is the forer when it comes. When God enters on the plea, he purſues for both principal and intereſt together. Hence,

3. The ſtroke in that caſe is ſudden, ſore, and of various kinds. Like a water long dammed up breaking out at length, it comes down ſuddenly, and over-flows all its banks.

Repent therefore, and betake yourſelves to Jeſus Chriſt, if ſo be ye may be hid in the day of the Lord's anger. Sinners day will come at length, and a ſad reckoning they will have.

But come what will come, let not the godly deſpond. In the foreſt days, "it ſhall be well with the righteous." See a ſtrange word, Luke xxi. 25, 28. "And there ſhall be ſigns in the ſun, and in the moon, and in the ſtars; and upon the earth diſtreſs of nations, with perplexity, the ſea and waves roaring, &c. And when theſe begin to come to paſs, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." What though there ariſe a ſtrong wind, rending the mountains, and breaking the rocks in pieces, and after that an earthquake, and after that a fire; the Lord may be coming after all in a ſtill ſmall voice, as he did in Elijah's time, 1 Kings xix. 11. The Lord may bring on the heavieſt judgments on our land, nay even make it nearly deſolate, yet out of the ruins of the whole, he may rear up a ſtately building to himſelf, and give to ſuch as ſhall ſurvive the deſolating ſtroke to ſee glorious days.

A Caveat

A Caveat againſt ſeeking great Things in an evil Day.

A

SERMON

Preached at ETTRICK, on a Faſt-day apointed by the Synod of Merſe and Teviotdale, April 24. 1729.

JEREMIAH xlv. 5.

And ſeekeſt thou great things for thyſelf? ſeek them not; for behold, I will bring evil upon all fleſh, ſaith the Lord: but thy life will I give unto thee for a prey in all places whither thou goeſt.

PRovidence is viſibly frowning on the land at this day, and on the country, inſomuch that few or none of us all have miſſed of theſe frowns, one way or other. Our great duty is to ſuit our ſpirits to the diſpenſations of the day. And the voice of God to each of us ſeems to be that in the text, "And ſeekeſt thou great things for thyſelf?" &c. O that we were as ſure of the well-grounded application of the latter part, as we are of the former.

This a part of God's meſſage to Baruch, a well-inclined pious young man, ſetting out in the world. He was Jeremiah's ſcribe, and read the roll, chap. xxxvi. Thereupon an order is iſſued out to apprehend him, and he is forced to abſcond. He is diſcouraged with that, and very uneaſy, one trouble coming on him on the neck of another, chapter xliii. 5. inſtead of the great things he had in view. In the words we have,

1. A

1. A check to him for the fret he was in, upon what he had met with. And therein,

(1.) He is rebuked for his golden dreams of worldly eaſe and comfort, the entertaining of which had made him ſo uneaſy on his diſappointment; "And ſeekeſt thou great things for thyſelf?" He is not rebuked for ſeeking ſimply: a time of trial ſhould be a time of requeſts, a praying time; but then we ſhould be ſure to ſeek aright. He was ſeeking great things for himſelf; not the great things of another world, that is never unſeaſonable; but the great things of this world, worldly eaſe, reſt, and proſperity: and had he ſought them with due ſubmiſſion to the will of God, it had not been ill taken; but he ſought them inordinately, being on the fret on the diſappointment. And therefore he is rebuked here, as for a thing unſeaſonable, ſhameful, and unreaſonable.

(2.) He is peremptorily ordered to humble and quiet himſelf, and ſuit his ſpirit to the diſpenſation of the day; "Seek them not:" Lay your neck under the yoke; be as a weaned child; and be mainly concerned how you may be carried through in the day of the Lord's anger.

2. The reaſon of this check given him. Wherein,

(1.) An univerſal calamity coming on the land, is laid before him: "Behold me bringing evil on all fleſh," Heb. A general ſtroke is on its way, when all will be in the utmoſt confuſion, by the Babylonians. Is it time for you to be painting your own cabin, when the whole ſhip is ſinking? to be dreaming of eaſe, when the Lord is riſen up to break down, and pluck up the whole land?

(2.) The moſt that was to be expected in ſuch a day, viz. to eſcape with the life, and that the Lord aſſures him of, "his life for a prey in all places whither he went." He intimates, that, ere all was done, he ſhould be well content to quit the great things, ſo that he could eſcape with the life. He ſhould have a toſſed life of it, going from place to place; but God would protect

would protect him, when many bulls ſhould lie on the green.

The ſubſtance of the words may be ſummed up in the two following doctrines.

DOCT. I. "The appearance of God's bringing a ſtroke on all, ſhould bring off men from ſeeking great things in a world for themſelves, and move them to ſuit their ſpirits to the diſpenſations of the day."

DOCT. II. "It ſhould move men, under ſuch an appearance, that a time may come, that they ſhall think they win well away that win away with their life."

I ſhall explain each doctrine in its order.

DOCT. I. "The appearance of God's bringing a ſtroke on all, ſhould bring off men from ſeeking great things in a world for themſelves, and move them to ſuit their ſpirits to the diſpenſations of the day."

In diſcourſing this ſubject, I ſhall ſhew,

I. What appearance there is of a general ſtroke coming on all at this day.

II. How we under that appearance ſhould ſuit our ſpirits to the diſpenſations of the day, not ſeeking great things.

III. Wherefore ſuch an appearance ſhould bring us off from ſeeking great things for ourſelves.

I. I ſhall ſhew what appearance there is of a general ſtroke coming on all at this day

1. Univerſal corruption of life and manners, as was the caſe in the antediluvian world, Gen. vi. 12. 13. "God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt for all fleſh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God ſaid unto Noah, The end of all fleſh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them: and behold, I will deſtroy them with the earth." A deluge of ſin is a preſage of a deluge of wrath. The former is let in upon us, and no wonder the latter follow. Profaneſs overflows all its

banks. There is a growing untenderneſs among all ranks in church and ſtate. Our very gold is become dim: religion is turned with many into mere form and ſhew, and many have quite loſt the very form which they had.

2. The notable ſtand which the ſucceſs of the goſpel is now at, Luke xiii. 7. It is near about forty years we have in peace been drinking in the rain of the goſpel; but where is the fruit now? Heb. vi. 7, 8. "For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dreſſed, receiveth bleſſing from God: but that which beareth thorns and briers, is rejected, and is nigh unto curſing; whoſe end is to be burned." This church is like land now ſo long laboured, that it is worn out. Look to our temple, and we may ſee departing glory, a ſad preſage; Ezek. ix. 3, 4. "And the glory of the God of Iſrael was gone up from the cherub whereupon he was, to the threſhold of the houſe, and he called to the man clothed with linen, which had the writer's inkhorn by his ſide; and the Lord ſaid unto him, Go through the midſt of the city, through the midſt of Jeruſalem, and ſet a mark upon the foreheads of the men that ſigh, and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midſt thereof." The white horſe of the goſpel deſpiſed, is followed with the red and pale horſe, and contempt of the marriage-feaſt with deſtroying armies. Conſider that alarming paſſage, Iſa. vi. 9, 10, 11. "Go and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but underſtand not; and ſee ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and ſhut their eyes, leſt they ſee with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and underſtand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. Then ſaid I, Lord, how long? And he anſwered, Until the cities be waſted without inhabitant, and the houſes without man, and the land be utterly deſolate.

3. Incorrigibleneſs under former ſtrokes, partly threatened and partly inflicted, as in Amos iv. Se-

ver-

ver. 12. "Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Iſrael: and becauſe I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Iſrael." O how often has the Lord been threatening this generation, theſe bygone years, with deſolating ſtrokes; yet has mercifully prevented, or carried them off without coming to an extremity! But ſtill as the new deliverance came, the generation has grown a degree worſe, till it has arrived now at a height.

4. Few mourners in Zion left among us. Many of them are now removed by death, whoſe room is not filled up, If. lvii 1. Such as remain, there is a damp on their ſpirits. The mouths of a praying remnant for a ſinking land are much cloſed, and their prayers returned into their boſom, as for a generation of wrath.

5. The ſtriking at the root of Chriſtianity, by the atheiſm and infidelity of the generation. That bitter root began to ſpring forth ſhortly after the revolution: but the magiſtrate effectually interpoſing, and making one an example to the reſt, it was curbed. But now it has ſpread broad and wide, and the proper divinity of the Son of God is attacked through the three nations by many. And the hands of the general aſſembly of this church have been filled with matter of that ſort. It was the oppoſition to the Son of God that ruined the Jewiſh nation, and it is like to be the drop in the cup of Britain and Ireland, that will make it run over.

6. Laſtly, The leſſer ſtrokes going through the whole land at this day, as ſigns of greater to come. Trade is decayed though the whole land, in the mean time a dearth of victual, an unuſual ſtroke upon the flocks, great ſickneſs, and frequent deaths in every corner, and a threatening ſeaſon, whereby the earth is made as iron already. Theſe things look like warnings of worſe to come.

II. I ſhall ſhew how we under that appearance

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II. I ſhall ſhew how we under that appearance

ſhould ſuit our ſpirits to the diſpenſations of the day, not ſeeking great things.

1. Awake out of your golden dreams of worldly eaſe, and lay your account with tribulation and trial, Iſ. xxxii. 9, 10. "Riſe up, ye women that are at eaſe, hear my voice, ye careleſs daughters, give ear unto my ſpeech. Many days and years ſhall ye be troubled, ye careleſs women: for the vintage ſhall fail, the gathering ſhall not come." There is a diſpoſition in all to dote this way, and build caſtles in the air that will never be inhabited. It is ſo with carnal men, who are often ſinging of peace, when deſtruction is at the door; as was the caſe with the rich man in the goſpel, Luke xii. 19, 20. I will ſay to my ſoul, Soul, thou haſt much goods laid up for many years: take thine eaſe, eat, drink and be merry. But God ſaid unto him, Thou fool, this night thy ſoul ſhall be required of thee: then whoſe ſhall thoſe things be which thou haſt provided?" And even good men are apt to fall into ſuch doting: Job xxix. 18. "Then I ſaid, I ſhall die in my neſt, and I ſhall multiply my days as the ſand." And it is evident from the caſe of the diſciples on the mount of tranſfiguration, who ſaid, "Lord, it is good for us to be here," Matth. xvii. 4. What was their fate? Peter was crucified, James was ſlain, John was baniſhed into a deſolate iſland, though he afterwards died in peace. If ye mind for heaven, at all times ye ſhall meet with tribulation, John xvi *ult.* Though ye hold the broad way, it is like in this time ye will meet with tribulation.

2. Set not your hearts upon the world's wealth, the ſilver and gold, the corn and cattle; for ye may ſoon find them like a ſandy bray, that will ſlide away with you: but if ye be weaned, and make God and his promiſes the ſtay of your heart, ye will be able to ſtand in the evil day, Hab. iii. 17. Let Chriſt be your all, and then blow what wind it will, all yours ſhall be ſafe.

3. Seek nothing, leſs nor more, in any way inconſiſtent

conſiſtent with juſtice or charity to your neighbour. Do not dare to drive on your own intereſt in any unjuſt way. Diveſt not yourſelves of mercy and charity to others, in purſuing your own intereſt, without any bowels of compaſſion. It is very ordinary in a time of public calamity, for one to build up himſelf on the ruins of another. For that ſort of work already, God is contending, and will not overlook it, Iſ. xxxiii. 1. "Wo to thee that ſpoileſt, and thou waſt not ſpoiled; and dealeſt treacherouſly, and they dealt not treacherouſly with thee; when thou ſhalt ceaſe to ſpoil, thou ſhalt be ſpoiled; and when thou ſhalt make an end to deal treacherouſly, they ſhall deal treacherouſly with thee." James ii. 13. "For he ſhall have judgment without mercy, that hath ſhewed no mercy."

4. Be content with, and thankful for the little that ye have, and take God's ſecurity for what ye want. "For he hath ſaid, I will never leave thee, nor forſake thee." Heb. xiii. 5. He that has taken ſome from you, might juſtly have taken all; and whatever he has taken from you, he might have taken your forfeited life when he took it. Therefore acknowledge ye are his debtors, and let not your croſſes and trials make you overlook mercies.

5. Sit quietly under your cloud, be it thinner or thicker, till the Lord be pleaſed to make it clear, and bring you forth to the light, Micah vii. 9. Whatever yoke the Lord lays on you, bear it tamely: and it will not gall your neck, be it never ſo heavy. Say as David, "Surely I have behaved and quieted myſelf as a child that is weaned of his mother: my ſoul is even as a weaned child," Pſal. cxxxi. 2.

Laſtly, Seek the things that are moſt neceſſary for yourſelves, and in them ye will not be diſappointed; Luke x. *ult.* "One thing is needful. And Mary hath choſen that good part, which ſhall not be taken away from her." It is to ſtir up hereunto, that God denies men great things of this world for it is hard to have

great things of this world, and not to ſlight the neceſſary things. And theſe are two.

(1.) Seek the happineſs of another world, Matth. vi. 33. "Seek ye firſt the kingdom of God, and his righteouſneſs, and all theſe things ſhall be added unto you." The more that providence frowns upon our lot here, let us be the more eager in our purſuis of a portion in heaven. If God refuſe to give us our good things in this life, let us take it for an intimation, that he will have us to inſiſt for them in the other life; Matth. vi. 20, 21. "Lay up for yourſelves treaſures in heaven, where neither moth nor ruſt doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor ſteal. For where your treaſure is, there will your heart be alſo."

(2.) Grace for the way to it, eſpecially for the time of trial, how to get cleanly through. The moſt neceſſary thing in a time of private affliction, or public calamity, is grace to carry right under it. That is more neceſſary than deliverance, as the ſoundneſs of the ſoul and conſcience is more valuable than eaſe to the outward man.

III. I ſhall ſhew wherefore ſuch an appearance ſhould bring us off from ſeeking great things for ourſelves. It may have this influence on us, if we conſider,

1. That we have enough to do otherwiſe, in preparing to meet the Lord, Amos iv. 12. When the Bridegroom is on his way, and the voice is heard, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him;" it is not time for the virgins to be trifling, but going out to met him. When the heavens are growing black above one's head, it is not for one to be lying at eaſe on the graſs, but to make away to the houſe, as did Noah, Heb. xi. 7. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not ſeen as yet, moved with fear prepared an ark to the ſaving of his houſe; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteouſneſs which is by faith."

2. Such

2. Such a carnal frame of ſpirit mightily unfits for a time of trial, Luke xxi. 34. "Take heed to yourſelves, leſt at any time your hearts be overcharged with ſurfeting, and drunkenneſs, and cares of this life, and ſo that day came upon you unawares." Jonah's being exceeding glad of the gourd, made the withering of it intolerable to him. It makes one like a ſilly dove, without heart, when courage and reſolution to ſet out againſt the fury of the ſtorm is moſt neceſſary.

3. Great things in an evil day expoſe men to greateſt troubles: ſo that many times they are like great weights of gold on a drowning man, that make him but ſink the faſter, Eccl. v. 13. "There is a ſore evil which I have ſeen under the ſun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt." And this may be one reaſon, why judgement ordinarily begins at the houſe of God, the Lord thereby making way for the main ſhocks becoming eaſy to them; as in the caſe of Lot. A ſtormy wind will rend up oaks by the roots, while ſhrubs are toſſed only from ſide to ſide, 2 Kings xxv. 7, 12. When one is breaking down a houſe, it is the higheſt ſtones that get the ſoreſt fall.

4. Great things in an evil day are great temptations. It is not eaſy to loſe at little for Chriſt and a good conſcience: the bond is the ſtronger to draw people out of the road, where they have great things in hazard. The Lord beſt knows our temper, and what is beſt for our ſafety in an evil day.

5. A low and afflicted lot in ſuch a day fits people for ſympathizing with others, 2 Cor. i. 6. "And whether we be afflicted, it is for your conſolation and ſalvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the ſame ſufferings, which we alſo ſuffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your conſolation and ſalvation." It is a ſelfiſh, hard-hearted world; and it is hard for them that are themſelves at eaſe in Zion, to be grieved for the affliction of Joſeph. Therefore, while the Lord is diſtributing

diſtributing ſorrows, let each welcome his own part, as neceſſary for that end.

Laſtly, Though great things are moſt eaſy for the outward man, a low and afflicted lot is moſt for the thriving of the inward. Zeph. iii. 12. "I will leave in the midſt of thee, an afflicted and poor people, and they ſhall truſt in the name of the Lord." It has readily more Chriſtian experiences, than the full, eaſy, proſperous life has. And though one may live more commodiouſly in the latter, yet it is more eaſy in the former caſe to die.

I ſhall conclude with a very few words on the ſecond doctrine.

DOCT. II. "It ſhould move men under ſuch an appearance, that a time may come, that they ſhall think they win well away that win away with their life."

A ſweeping ſtroke of mortality, whereof we have had an awful ſwatch, a ſtroke of peſtilence, famine, or the ſword of a foreign enemy, would ſoon make us forget all other things, ſo that life might by ſafe. We have been threatened with all theſe, and it is very like that ſome of them will be the lot of this generation, Num. xxiv. 23. "Alas! who ſhall live when God doth this!" They bid fair to get their life for a prey in ſuch a caſe, that are ſuiting their ſpirits to their lot, and to the diſpenſations of providence, not ſeeking great things for themſelves, though they ſigh while others ſing. Therefore ſecure an intereſt in Chriſt, and in the covenant that ſtands faſt in him, and live by faith, and ſo it may be ye ſhall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.

Mercy

Mercy often interpoſes to prevent the Execution of Judgments.

A

SERMON

Preached at ETTRICK, November 26. 1729; being a Day of Thankſgiving appointed by the Preſbytery of Selkirk, for the plentiful Harveſt.

HOSEA xi. 8.

How ſhall I give thee up, Ephraim? how ſhall I deliver thee, Iſrael? how ſhall I make thee as Admah? how ſhall I ſet thee as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together.

THIS is the very language of God's diſpenſations to us at this day, whereby it is come to paſs that we are allowed an occaſion of thankſgiving, after very threatening appearances of providence.

We have here repreſented to us a ſtruggle betwixt the divine attributes, as to the proceeding with Ephraim or Iſrael, one crying, Strike; another, Hold thy hand. It is ſpoken of God after the manner of men; not as if there were any real contrariety of motions and affections in God, who is always of one mind: but in reſpect of the variouſneſs of the events of providence towards a ſinful people, he is repreſented as a kind, but provoked Father, in whom there is a ſtruggle of affections towards his rebellious ſon. And here there is,

1. A demand and motion of juſtice againſt Iſrael, called

called Ephraim, for that was the chief tribe of them. And it is ſuppoſed. The demand of juſtice is, Ephraim is bent to backſliding, let him be given up as an incorrigible ſon, an incurable parient. Iſrael called to the Moſt High is deaf to the call, let him be delivered into the hand of the enemy, as a lamb to the lion to be rent in pieces. They have carried themſelves like the neighbours of Sodom and Gomorrah, rather than thoſe of Judah; let them be made like them, like Admah and Zeboim: Gen. xix 24. "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom, and upon Gomorrah, brimſtone and fire from the Lord out of heaven." Let the threatening be executed. Deut. xxix. 23. "The whole land thereof is brimſtone, and ſalt, and burning, that it is not ſown, nor beareth, nor any graſs groweth therein, like the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the Lord overthrew in his anger and in his wrath."

2. An interpoſing of mercy in their favour, expreſſed. Mercy ſays, "How ſhall I give thee up? How can I find in my heart to do it! Thou art my ſon, though a very untoward one; my people, though a very rebellious people. I find the bowels of a father ſtirring towards thee: it is hard for me to make thee like thoſe mine enemies that never ſtood in ſuch a relation to me.

3. The workings of mercy to ſtop the execution of the demands of juſtice. My heart inflamed with anger againſt them, is turned within me into kindneſs and compaſſion. Every time I begin to ſtrike, my heart miſgives me, that I muſt draw back my hand; ſtill I relent for him to repent, and theſe relenting or repenting bowels within me glow towards him, cauſing to pity and ſpare.

The doctrine obſervable from the words is,

DOCT. "Our gracious God being loth to go to an extremity with a people in ſpecial relation to him,

mercy

mercy often interpoſeth for their relief, when they are "on the brink of ruin."

In handling this doctrine, I ſhall,

I. Take notice of ſome things ſuppoſed in this.

II. How mercy interpoſeth for the relief of ſuch a people, when on the brink of ruin.

III. Give reaſons why mercy thus interpoſeth in ſuch a caſe.

IV. Apply.

I. I ſhall take notice of ſome things ſuppoſed in this. It ſuppoſes,

1. That a people in ſpecial relation to God, as his church, his covenanted people, may ſo far forget their duty, and give themſelves the looſe in ſinful courſes, that they juſtly deſerve to be abandoned, given up, and caſt off by him. The viſible church ſometimes behaves itſelf in moſt of its members, as if they were the ſynagogue of Satan. This is clear from the text, and confirmed by our caſe at this day.

2. God is impartial in his judgments; and if God's covenant-people carry themſelves like ſtrangers, they may expect at length to fare like them. Juſtice has a demand on the ſinners in Zion, as well as on the ſinners in Babylon, Iſ. xlii. 24. "Who gave Jacob for a ſpoil, and Iſrael to the robbers? did not the Lord, he againſt whom we have ſinned? for they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient unto his law?" And the ſtrokes of God on thoſe of his own houſe, when they do come on in earneſt, are readily very ſore, Amos iii. 2. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will puniſh you for all your iniquities." Their peculiar relation to him puts a peculiar edge on them.

3. Matters may be going faſt to an extremity with ſuch a people, and they yet continuing their courſe, and remaining impenitent. So was it here; there was nothing in their carriage to alter the courſe of providence

providence towards them: they continued their provocation in the face of the moſt awful threatenings, and when on the brink of ruin. And juſt ſo it is with the generation in theſe lands at this day.

Laſtly, When there is no reaſon from them to ſtop procedure againſt them, God out of his ſovereign mercy may yet put a ſtop to it. So he did with Iſrael in Egypt, Ezek. xx. 8, 9. "But they rebelled againſt me, and would not hearken unto me: they did not every man caſt away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forſake the idols of Egypt: then I ſaid, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accompliſh my anger againſt them in the midſt of the land of Egypt. But I wrought for my name's ſake, that it ſhould not be polluted before the heathen, among whom they were, in whoſe ſight I made myſelf known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt." And many time on the deliverances of his people, and on ours in particular, may that be written, Ezek. xxxvi. 32. "Not for your ſakes do I this, ſaith the Lord God, be it known unto you: be aſhamed and confounded for your own ways, O houſe of Iſrael."

II. I ſhall ſhew how mercy interpoſeth for the relief of ſuch a people, when on the brink of ruin.

1. By putting off the execution of threatenings againſt them, when they ſeem to be come to the very point of execution. Thus the barren fig-tree, when the ſentence was paſſed on it, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" Luke xiii. 7. was, by the interpoſition of mercy, ſpared another year; and the old world was ſpared ſeven days after the expiring of the hundred and twenty years. How many times have the clouds been black about our heads ready to ſhower down, and yet the ſtorm has blown by?

2. By moderating the ſtroke when it has come on, that it has not gone to the extremity that might have been feared, Iſ. xxvii. 8. "In meaſure when it ſhooteth forth, thou wilt debate with it; he ſtayeth his rough wind

wind in the day of the east-wind.' The destroying axe being threatened, mercy has prevailed to hold with the pruning knife; and God has lightly afflicted, when justly he might have made his strokes heavy to a pitch.

Lastly, By putting a stop even to the course of lesser strokes, when he might have carried them on to the making of a full end, Jer. v. 10. "Go ye up upon her walls, and destroy, but make not a full end: take away her battlements, for they are not the Lord's." He returns and does them good, after he has done them evil. Having pinched them a while, in mercy he relieves them, looses their bands, and lays meat again before them.

III. I shall give the reasons why mercy thus interposeth for the relief of such a people on the brink of ruin.

1. Because of a mourning and serious remnant that may be among them, endeavouring to keep their garments clean, as God would have spared Sodom, if there had been but ten righteous persons found in it, Gen. xviii. 32. In public calamities they readily bear their share, and the Lord himself has a sympathy with them in their afflictions, as he had with Israel, Is. lxiii. 9. "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them, and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old." And therefore he extends mercy to the community wherein they are. And he has a regard to their prayers and supplication in that case; Exod. xxxii. 10. "Now therefore let me alone, says the Lord to Moses, that my wrath may wax hot against them."

2. Because of the insolence wherewith their enemies would carry themselves, both towards God and them, if God should give up with them. Many a time the church is more obliged for preservation to the insolent temper of her enemies, than to the good

diſpoſition of many of her members; Deut. xxxii. 26, 27. "I ſaid, I would ſcatter them into corners, (ſaid the Lord of Iſrael of old) I would make the remembrance of them to ceaſe from among men: were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy, leſt their adverſaries ſhould behave themſelves ſtrangely, and leſt they ſhould ſay, Our hand is high, and the Lord hath not done all this" The blaſphemies of a Popiſh and malignant party have been a plea for mercy to keep us hitherto out of their hands.

Laſtly, Becauſe God has a peculiar delight in mercy, it is his darling attribute, Micah vii. 18. As the bee naturally gives honey, but does not ſting, except when it is irritated and provoked; ſo God readily goes into the ſide of mercy, and does not puniſh but when provoked to anger, Lam. iii. 33. "For he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." It is his ſtrange act, Iſ. xxviii. 21. "For the Lord ſhall riſe up as in mount Perazim, he ſhall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his ſtrange work, and bring to paſs his act, his ſtrange act."

I ſhall conclude with a very ſhort improvement.

This day this ſcripture is fulfilled in our eyes, as it has been many a day. Had the ſummer been of a piece with the threatening unnatural like ſpring, it was bad as it was; but it would have been far more ſo. Had this harveſt miſgiven as it ſome time threatened, what a heavy condition would the country have been in for want of bread! Therefore,

1. Let us be thankful to God, whoſe mercy interpoſed ſeaſonably for our relief, when we were on the brink of ruin. To that we muſt attribute the relief, not to our own behaviour. For the ſins of the generation, the Atheiſm, blaſphemy, profaneneſs, unfruitfulneſs under the goſpel, added to the ſins of former times, with the killing aggravations thereof, demanded ruining ſtrokes.

2. Let us own God to be a gracious God, ſlow to

wrath

wrath; saying with David, Psalm cxix. 68. "Thou art good, and doſt good." And Psalm cxiv. 8, 9. "The Lord is gracious, and full of compaſſion, ſlow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his other works." Let his goodneſs lead and excite us to repentance, and to a more conſcientious uſe of plenty; and learn to "fear the Lord, and his goodneſs," Hoſ. iii. 5. walking humbly before him in a ſenſe of undeſerved favour. Jacob's example is worthy of our imitation in this matter, Gen. xxxii. 10. "I am not worthy of the leaſt of all the mercies, (ſays he), and of all the truth, which thou haſt ſhewed unto thy ſervant."

2. Let us know that this kind dealing will render us inexcuſable, if we repent not, and turn from all our ſins unto God through Chriſt. The favourable interpoſitions of his providence towards us, time after time, not having their deſigned effect upon us, in melting us, our guilt will thereby be fearfully heightened. See in what light the Lord conſiders ſuch conduct, and how, he repreſents it, Iſ. i. 1, 2. "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath ſpoken, I have nouriſhed and brought up children, and they have rebelled againſt me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the aſs his maſter's crib: but Iſrael doth not know, my people doth not conſider."

Laſtly, Ruining ſtrokes coming on after ſuch workings of mercy, will go to the quick, and bring double ruin on the generation. The more mercy has prevailed to ward off judgments, the heavier will judgments be when they come. Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord, let us be induced to return unto him in the exerciſe of faith, goſpel repentance, and reformation according to his word.

The Duty of owning God in our civil Affairs recommended and urged.

A

SERMON

Preached at ETTRICK, March 22. 1719.

JOSHUA ix. 14.

And the men took of their victuals, and asked not counsel at the mouth of the Lord.

AMONG the evidences of the decay of religion at this day, is none of the leaſt, that God and his law are ſo little owned and looked to, in managing of civil affairs. Many in theſe affairs, though of great weight, have little or no uſe at all for their religion. Men can diſpoſe to themſelves and families, and enter into bargains and contracts, without ever looking further than their worldy intereſt or fancy. This is the time of year wherein the throng of that kind comes in. And I would caution you againſt forgetting God in theſe matters.

In the text we have the error of the princes of Iſrael in their managing of their bargain with the Gibeonites, which was diſpleaſing and diſhonourable to God, uncomfortable to themſelves when they ſaw afterwards how they had been outwitted, but could not mend themſelves, and offenſive to the congregation. Their error lay in theſe two things.

1. Their learning to their underſtanding in the whole management of the buſineſs; "The men, the princes of Iſrael, took of their victuals," their mouldy proviſion.

proviſion. They did not this out of any want of victuals of their own, nor fondeſs they had for theirs, nor as feaſting with them upon them, for they would have made but a very unpleaſant meal. But they did it to examine the truth of their repreſentation; and by their handling and taſting of them they found they were old and dry, and upon this inſufficient proof were ſatisfied, that all was as was repreſented, and ſo proceeded to covenant with them.

2. Not owning of God in the buſineſs. They might and ought to have aſked the Lord's mind in this matter, and to have walked by his direction. But as if they had been independent of God in ſuch matters, and had been wiſe enough to ſee to themſelves, they never owned God in the matter. No doubt they thought they needed not, that it was a plain caſe: but therein they find their raſhneſs mires them afterward. Had they firſt aſked counſel of God, and then taken of their victuals, they had diſcovered the cheat and kept their conſciences clean. But they left God, and God left them, in the buſineſs.

Doctr. "As it is the duty of all to own and acknowledge God in their civil affairs, and buſineſs with men in the world; ſo God takes notice of, and is much diſpleaſed with mens not owning of him in theſe."

In diſcourſing from this point, I ſhall,

I. Give the reaſons of the doctrine.

II. Shew whence it is that men do not own God in their affairs.

III. Apply.

I. I am to give the reaſon of the doctrine. Conſider,

1. God's command binds us peremtorily to own him in all our ways without exception, Prov. iii. 6. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he ſhall direct thy paths." We muſt take our religion along with us,

to the court and to the market, as well as to the church and the closet; to our dealings with men, as well as to our dealings with God, and that under the pain of disobedience to the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. How then can one imagine, but God is displeased with the not owning him in these things?

2. God has given a promise of direction to his people in all their matters, Prov. iii. 6. forcited. Psalm cxii. 5.—"A good man——will guide his affairs with discretion." And what God has put into the covenant by way of promise, his people ought to look to him for by faith, and sue to him for by prayer. And it is highly dishonouring to God, not to be concerned for that which he has made promise of, Ezek. xxxvi. 37. "Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them."

3. We can do nothing well or wisely in any matter, but as the Lord is pleased to direct and guide us, Jer. x. 23. "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." Common gifts are from the Lord as well as saving grace, James i. 17. "Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Exod. xxxi. 6. "In the hearts of all that are wise-hearted I have put wisdom." If one man have a dexterity to manage his civil affairs better than another, it is the Lord himself that makes the difference. And he has the lock and key of these gifts, to give the use and exercise of them, or to take it away in any particular whatsoever, when he pleases. Hence often the wisest are outwitted, and act as egregious fools, being infatuated of God.

4. The success of all our projects and endeavours depends on God entirely, so that men may do their best to no purpose, while God frowns on the business, Lam. iii. 37. "Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?" Psal. cxxvii. 1. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman

man waketh but in vain." God has a negative on all means and inſtruments, ſo that the moſt feaſible means ſhall miſcarry, if he do not order them to proſper. God has a wheel within all the wheels of the world, which turns them what way he will: ſo that often many does propoſe one way, but God diſpoſeth a quite other way.

II. I proceed to ſhew, whence it is that men do not own God in their affairs.

1. Habitual untenderneſs of conſcience is a main cauſe of it. Hence our Lord ſays, "If thine eye be evil thy whole body ſhall be full of darkneſs. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkneſs, how great is that darkneſs! Mat. vi. 23. Moſt men have benumbed conſciences, which makes them go through the world at random, hardly fearing the offence of God in any thing, Tit. i. *ult.* "They profeſs that they know God; but in works they deny him." They who are truly tender in one thing of offending God, will be tender in all things: but who can think, that thoſe who are untender in all other matters, can be tender in their worldy buſineſs? Paul's exerciſe would mix religion with civil buſineſs, Acts xxiv. 16. "Herein do I exerciſe myſelf, ſays he, to have always a conſcience void of offence toward God, and toward men." But alas! it is rare in the world.

2. Moſt mens religion is but a powerleſs, vain empty ſhew, 2 Tim. iii. 5. "Having a form of godlineſs, but denying the power thereof. It cannot awe their conſciences to a ſtrict conformity to the way of God in all things, without reſerve. They have ſtill their reſerves in their obedience, which never comes to be univerſal. They halve religion, pretend and make a ſhew of piety towards God, which cannot ſtand in the way of their worldy intereſt: but they make no conſcience of righteouſneſs, mercy and charity, towards men. Well may the Lord addreſs them, as he did the people of Judah of old, Iſ. i. 11, 16, 17. "To what purpoſe is the multitude

multitude of your ſacrifices unto me? ſaith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beaſts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats.—Waſh ye, make ye clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, ceaſe to do evil, learn to do well, ſeek judgment, relieve the oppreſſed, judge the fatherleſs, plead for the widow."

3. Many lay their projects in theſe matters ſo contrary to the rules of religion, that they cannot look for God's bleſſing on them, or direction in them, Pſalm. xiv. 4 "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge? ——they call not upon the Lord." So they do not own God in them, becauſe they ſee, upon a view of their meaſures, that they are unlawful ones, and their conſciences would condemn them before the Lord. They are ruled by their luſts and paſſions in their contrivances, which makes them break over the rules of piety towards God, and righteouſneſs towards men, to accompliſh their deſigns. And what uſe could religion be of in theſe, but to mar all? and therefore they carefully ſtave off the dictates of their conſciences, to make way for the fulfilling of their unlawful projects.

4. Self-conceit. Men have a high opinion of their own wit, and are confident they can guide well enough, and ſo they do not ſee their need of owning God in theſe matters. Thus in the text, "The men took of their victuals, and aſked not counſel at the mouth of God." But little do they conſider that paſſage, Prov. xxiii. 26. "My ſon, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes obſerve my ways." This is to make fleſh our arm, which God can ſoon make a withered arm, Jer. xvii. 5, 6. Living by faith is quite contrary to this, and carries men out of themſelves to depend on God in all things. And there is good reaſon for it. For ſays the wiſe man, Eccl. ix. 11. "I returned, and ſaw under the ſun, that the race is not to the ſwift, nor the battle to the ſtrong, neither yet bread to the wiſe, nor

nor yet riches to men of underſtanding, nor yet favour to men of ſkill, but time and chance happeneth to them all."

5. Many are ſo little acquainted with religion, and particularly with the way of looking to the Lord, for direction in all things, that they do not think religion is concerned in their civil affairs, farther than that the thing they do be lawful in itſelf. But this is a wide miſtake. People may periſh by lawful things, following them in a way not approved of God, as we ſee in the caſe of the old world, Matth. xxiv. 38. "In the days that they were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, &c. We are obliged to eye the honour of God in all things, (1 Cor. x. 31. "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatſoever ye do, do all to the glory of God: to do all in the name of the Lord Jeſus," Col. iii. 17. that is, in obedience to his call pointed out to us by his word and providence, and in dependence on him for direction, throughbearing in it, and ſucceſs. This was the Pſalmiſt's practice, Pſalm cxxiii. 2. "Behold, as the eyes of ſervants look unto the hand of their maſters, and as the eyes of of a maiden unto the hands of her miſtreſs: ſo our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us.

6. Laſtly, Not weighing the event of their projects, which is wholly in the hand of the Lord. Had the princes of Iſrael conſidered, what weight was in this buſineſs, and what it turned to within three days after they had made their bargain, ver. 16. They would not have been to rath. How often is that done in a day or hour with much confidence, that is regretted many a day and year? Lot ſettled among thoſe of Sodom without conſulting of God, Gen. xiii. 10, 12, 13. but afterward, as he had little peace while he was there, he got a very ſad removing again. Since we know not what may be in the womb of a day, we had

need

need every day to live in a close dependence on the Lord.

I now proceed to apply this subject, and the only use I shall make of it, shall be by ways of exhortion.

I exhort all to own and acknowledge God in your civil affairs and business in the world. Behave yourselves as Christians, as fearers of God, therein, at all times and especially at such times wherein ye have business of greatest weight in hand. Take not the way of the world, as ye would not perish with the world.

1. Tenants, in the taking of your lands, own God the great Landlord, and wrong not your neighbours, 1 Cor. vi. 9. And whether ye sit or remove, be sure ye do it with a good conscience. Abuse not the goodness of God, in the thriving of your stocks, lest God send a curse on them and make room enough. It will not excuse you before God, that ye do not begin the work; "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil," Exod. xxiii. 2. Ye must not follow either. Will one's wronging you give you a licence to wrong another? No, not if it were the very person that had wronged you, far less another that has done you no injury, Prov. iii. 31. "Envy thou not the oppressor, and chuse none of his ways." Chap. xxiv. 29. "Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work." No-doubt it is Satan's game to find out some to lead the van in an unrighteous course, that others may follow.

2. Masters, in the hiring of your servants, own God the great Master, remembering that every Christian's family should be a church, Rom. xvi. 5. Gather not together the scum and dregs of servants, which may be the reproach of a society into which they come. Read the 101st psalm, and inquire what they are, and what they have been, as well as what they can do. It is hard to get choice, I own: but when a person has laid the matter seriously before the Lord, begged God's direction

direction therein, for the furnishing of his family, and done his best endeavour in the way of means, he may have the more peace whatever way it fall.

3. Servants in your disposing of yourselves, own God the great Master; and make it a matter of solemn seriousness, what company you cast yourselves into. Have regard to the interest of your souls, and not to your worldly interest only, in that matter. It is a business of great weight, how ye dispose of yourselves, and there may be in it either a snare to your souls, or advantage to them. And it is a pity it should be so lightly thought of. Labour to know the mind of God in the matter, by his word and by his providence. And labour to be sure ye be there God is guiding you to by his eye set on you.

4. Lastly, Let every one in their civil affairs in the world own God, and carry their religion about with them, in whatever business providence lays to their hand. Remember the text, and split not on the rock which the princes of Israel dashed upon. Therefore,

1st, Entertain no project, though promising never so fair for your temporal advantage, which is not just being weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, no project which will wound your conscience in the least. Consider that passage, Isaiah xxxiii. 14, 15. "The sinners in Zion are afraid, fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites: who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who amongst us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly, he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high," &c. An unjust project, tending to the wronging of any man, is what God will never bless; and is to be looked on as a bait of the devil, for catching the soul, wherein the

the loſs is a thouſand times more than the gain, as will appear at balancing the accounts.

2dly, Lay all your juſt projects and lawful deſigns, eſpecially in matters of greateſt weight, before the Lord in prayer, Phil. iv. 6. "Be careful for nothing: but in every thing, by prayer and ſupplication, with thankſgiving, let your requeſts be made known unto God. Beg of God direction to what may be moſt convenient for you, Prov. xxx. 8. laying yourſelves down at his feet. It is he that has determined the bounds of all mens habitations, has the heart of all men in his hands, and can bring them together for their comfort, who knew not of one another. Beg of him wiſdom and diſcretion to manage your affairs; for he it is who doth inſtruct him to diſcretion, and doth teach him," Iſ. xxviii. 26. And beg of him ſucceſs in your lawful undertakings, Pſalm. i. 3.

3dly, Purſue ſolemn prayers with frequent ejaculations to the Lord in the time of the management of your affairs, 1 Theſſ. v. 17. "Pray without ceaſing." Sometimes ye muſt come into difficulties in theſe things. Faithleſs thinking how to do, becomes not a Chriſtian. Look up to the Lord, and think, pray, and conſider what is beſt to be done. Perhaps the nature of the thing will not allow ſolemn prayer. But people can never be in ſuch a hurry or haſte to come to a point, but they may get time for an ejaculation, for a glance of the eye of the ſoul to the Lord, as Nehemiah did, chap. ii. 4. There is a promiſe to fix on in ſuch a caſe, Prov. iv. 12. "When thou goeſt, thy ſteps ſhall not be ſtraitened; and when thou runneſt, thou ſhalt not ſtumble."

4tly, Hold cloſely and ſtrictly by the rule of juſtice, as managing your affairs under the eye of a juſt God, who hates all unrighteouſneſs. God requires this of thee, Micah vi. 8. "to do juſtly." 1 Theſſ. iv. 6. "That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter." A man may be juſt in his dealings, and yet no

Chriſtian who is not juſt in his dealings. Keep the golden rule of righteouſneſs always before your eyes, "Whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do unto you, do ye even ſo to them." And do not to others, what you would not have done to you in their circumſtances. And remember, that God the Judge of all is no reſpecter of perſons, nor can be biaſſed in favour of any man.

5*thly*, Never reckon that advantageous which will not be for God's honour, and for your ſoul's good, 1 Cor. x. 31. forecited. Separate gain from godlineſs, and the gain will not be worth the taking up at your foot, being but a bait to cover the hook that will pierce into the ſoul. The intereſt of eternity is the greateſt intereſt, and what is beſt for that is beſt for the man, be what he will. And therefore in all changes and projects whatſoever, aſk yourſelves, Will this be beſt for my ſoul's behoof?

6. Laſtly, Manage your matters without anxiety and diſtruſtful cares, but with a believing dependence on the Lord, having firſt laid them over on God. It becomes a chriſtian well to reſt ſatisfied, and ſay, "He ſhall chuſe our inheritance for us," Pſalm xlvii. 4. Anxiety is unprofitable; but dependence on the Lord both gives eaſe to the heart, and has its plentiful income of fruit in the Lord's own time. For motives, conſider,

Motive 1. God's eye is on us at all times, and he will call us to an account of our behaviour in our civil affairs as well as in others, Eccl xii. 13, 14. "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God ſhall bring every work into judgment, with every ſecret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." Let us keep in view that awful tribunal then where-ever we go, whatever we be employed about; ſo ſhall we be excited to walk as in the ſight of him, who is now our witneſs, and will hereafter be our judge.

Motive 2. Our time is ſo ſhort, and the continuance

of our buſineſs in the world ſo uncertain, that nothing which can be gained by going out of God's way, is worth the pains of going off our way for it. A little ground will ſerve each of us ere long, and ere long we ſhall have no more portion in what is done under the ſun.

Mot. 3. A little gain with God's good-will and approbation is better than much without it, Pſal. xxxvii. 16. There is more ſap and foiſon in it, men have a ſurer hold of it, and there is a vaſt difference in the after reckoning.

Mot. 4. This is the moſt comfortable way in caſe of matters miſgiving, and in caſe of diſappointments and croſſes in the world. Our comforts in the world are very uncertain. Riches are not for ever A man may meet with a croſs in the way where God bids him go, and with a ſtroke in the way he went without God's leave But the former has inward peace, which the other wants in that caſe.

Mot. 5. At this rate, ye may have communion with God in your civil affairs, and experiences of the Lord's love in your worldly buſineſs, which the world knows not of, as Jacob had, Gen. xxxiii. 10. Anſwers of prayer are ſweet in whatever matter they be; and to get a common mercy in the way of dependence on the Lord, puts a double value on it.

Mot. 6. The ſtriving againſt the ſtream of a wicked generation requires this. There are many to diſhonour God, by not owning him in their civil affairs; join not with them, leſt religion be wounded through your ſides. When the beſt is as a brier, and the moſt upright as a thorn-hedge, it paves the way for a national ſtroke, with which we are ſo much threatened

Mot. 7. laſt. As ever ye would have a bleſſing, and eſcape a curſe on your labours, and your ſouls too, own God in your affairs. For whoſo honoureth God, he will honour, and make him proſperous. Wiſdom will be juſtified of her children.

Reſolute

Reſolute cleaving to the Lord Jeſus illuſtrated and enforced.

A

SERMON

Preached at Galaſhiels, Sabbath afternoon, Auguſt 6 1721, after the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

ACTS xi. 23.

And exhorted them all, that with purpoſe of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.

IN ſome preceding verſes we have an account of a great addition make to the Chriſtian church, by the converſion of many in Antioch and other places. The means of it was the preaching of Chriſt; that is the appointed means of the converſion of ſinners, Gal. iii. 2. The occaſion of the goſpel coming to that people, was the perſecution raiſed at Jeruſalem. Satan's deſign in it was to quench the holy fire, but God turned it about to the ſpreading and increaſing of it. Thus Satan is often outſhot in his own bow; and God's people, the more they are oppreſſed, the more they grow. What this ſucceſs was owing to, was the hand of the Lord with the preachers. No doubt there was a more than ordinary edge upon the ſpirits of the perſecuted miniſters who preached to them; but that was not it which did the buſineſs, but "the hand of the Lord with them." The neareſt means of their converſion was their believing: faith is that which turns the whole

man unto God. The news of this ſucceſs of the goſpel coming to the church at Jeruſalem, Barnabas is ſent from thence, to them, to hold hand to the work. And in the words of the text we may obſerve,

1. How he was affected when he came among them. Diſcerning the grace of God among them ſhining forth in their way and walk, he was glad. He rejoiced in ſpirit, to ſee the hopeful caſe they were in as to their ſouls, they having embraced Chriſt. The reaſon is remarkable, ver. 24. "For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghoſt, and of faith." And a good man will rejoice in the ſucceſs of the goſpel, whoever be the inſtruments God makes uſe of and honours therein; though ſelfiſh men are apt to grudge in ſuch a caſe.

2. What he did, when he came among them. He bent his endeavours towards their confirmation, in "exhorting them all, that with purpoſe of heart they would cleave unto the Lord." Thoſe whom he exhorted were all, viz. thoſe who appeared to have embraced Chriſt. The duty he exhorted them to, is to cleave to the Lord, the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who was preached to them, ver. 20. and whom they had received. The words properly ſignify "to abide by the Lord," much akin to that, John xv. 4. "Abide in me." The manner of the duty is, "with purpoſe of heart, i. e. reſolutely, laying it down aforehand for a ſure concluſion, that come what would, they muſt not part with him, but abide by him.

The following doctrine ſeems native from the words.

Doct. Reſolute cleaving to, and abiding by Chriſt, is the great duty, which all that appear to have received him, are to be exhorted to.

In diſcourſing from this doctrine, I will ſhew,

I. In

I. In the general, what is implied in this reſolute cleaving to, and abiding by Chriſt.

II. Why thoſe that have received Chriſt, are to be exhorted to cleave reſolutely to, and abide by him.

III. Make ſome practical improvement.

I. I ſhall ſhew you in the general, what is implied in this reſolute cleaving to, and abiding by Chriſt. It implies,

1. The ſoul's taking hold of Chriſt offered in the goſpel, John i. 12. being once joined to the Lord by faith, Cor. vi. 17. They that are not joined to the Lord, and ſo not disjoined from their former lovers, cannot cleave to the Lord; they that are not yet come to Chriſt, cannot abide by him. The foundation muſt be laid in the ſoul's cloſing with Chriſt, before there can be place for the ſuperſtructure, *viz.* cleaving to him.

2. That the ſeparation of the ſoul from Chriſt will be eſſayed, while we are here, we muſt lay our account with it, Rom. viii. 35. The devil, the world, and the fleſh will make the eſſay. People had need to hold; for aſſuredly theſe enemies will draw. (1) They will try to ſeduce you by ſoft methods, to draw you to deſtruction with ſilken cords of temptation. (2.) To drive you away by violence, and force you from Chriſt by hard methods, as with iron rods, Cant. viii. 7. There are two ways to rob one of their love to Chriſt, ſmothering it with earth, and quenching it with floods of water.

3. Keeping hold of Chriſt over the belly of all the eſſays made to part us from him, Cant. viii. 7. We muſt keep the hold we have got, and not quit it come what will. We muſt ſtand our ground, however hot the battle be for ſeparating us from him. We muſt abide by him. (3.) Without intermiſſion, Pſal. cxix. 112. "I have inclined mine heart, (ſays David,) to perform thy ſtatutes alway, even unto the end." We muſt not be hereaway thereaway in our religion; one day for

God, and another day for the devil; taking our religion by fits and ſtarts: but remember, that our ears are bored to Chriſt's door-poſts to be for him for ever. (2.) Without defection, Heb. x. 38. If any man draw back, my ſoul ſhall have no pleaſure in him," Pſalm cxix. 112. forecited. We muſt not forſake our Captain, and go over to the enemies camp; elſe it had been better for us we had never known the way of righteouſneſs, Luke ix. *ult.* "No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

II. I ſhall ſhew why thoſe that appear to have received Chriſt, are to be exhorted to cleave reſolutely to, and abide by him.

1. Becauſe ſome ſuch may fall away, as not being really what they appear to be, 1 Cor. x. 12. "Let him that thinketh he ſtandeth, take heed leſt he fall." There are branches in Chriſt, which being bound up with the ſtock, by the external bond of ſacraments, &c. yet never truly knit with it by faith, that come at length to be taken away, John xv. 2. Some there are, who, if they get not a faſter grip of Chriſt than yet they have got, will ſurely part with him, by ſome temptation like a ſet wedge driven betwixt the Lord and them. But if they would preſs forward, they may come to get ſuch a grip of him yet, as may ſecure them againſt total apoſtaſy.

2. Becauſe exhortations of that nature are means appointed of God, to keep the ſaints upon their guard againſt temptations to apoſtaſy, to cauſe them more reſolutely to hold on their way, and to labour to grow up more into Chriſt, by which they may ſtand more firm, as in the caſe of the diſciples, John vi 67, 68. who when Jeſus ſaid unto them, "Will ye alſo go away? replied by the mouth of Peter, "Lord, to whom ſhall we go? thou haſt the words of eternal life" God has joined together the end and the means of his own appointment; therefore though the perſeverance of the

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ſaints is put beyond all doubt, from their being members of Chriſt, yet ſuch exhortations are not in vain.

3. They are of uſe to others too, to keep them from open and barefaced apoſtaſy. So Joaſh was kept back from groſs extravagancies, while good Jehoiada lived, 2 Chron. xxiv. 2. and xvii. 18. Exhortations from the Lord's word may have a moral influence on men as rational creatures, to keep them back from being ſo bad as otherwiſe they would be.

4. Becauſe cleaving to Chriſt is the comprehenſive duty of the Chriſtian life. To believe in him, and cleave to him, is the whole duty of man, as it is ſummed up by the apoſtle, Col. ii. 6. "As ye have therefore received Chriſt Jeſus the Lord, ſo walk ye in him." And we know no other holineſs of life competent to fallen man, but what is a cleaving to Chriſt, and walking in him. What is of another ſtamp among men, is but mere morality, not holineſs. John xv. 5. "I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the ſame bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

I ſhall now make ſome practical improvement of this ſubject.

I exhort you then with purpoſe of heart to cleave to the Lord Jeſus Chriſt. There has been a hopeful appearance among you this day, and ſome of you have with the moſt awful ſolemnity declared your having received him. While ye are in the world, means will be uſed to withdraw you from him. But I exhort you with purpoſe of heart to cleave to him, as your all, and in all.

Firſt, Cleave to him as your all. Say with the pſalmiſt, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I deſire beſides thee," Pſal. lxxiii. 25. One throne admits not two kings, nor one heart two maſters, viz. Chriſt and the world, John vi. 44. If ye have received him aright, ye have received him for your all, cleave to him as ſuch; need no more,

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ye may ſay, as Phil. iv. 18. "I have all, and abounded." I allude to Gen. xx. 16. and ſay, "Behold, he is to thee a covering of the eyes." And particularly cleave to him,

1. As your God, your Lord, head and huſband, Pſal. xlv. 11. "He is thy Lord, and worſhip thou him." Hang by the marriage-tie, O believer, plead it Cant. ii. 16. "My beloved is mine, and I am his;" and quit it not at any time, no not in your loweſt caſe, Job xiii. 15. "Though he ſlay me, yet will I truſt in him. But what ſhall I do when guilt lies on my conſcience? Why, quit it not then neither, Jer. iii. 14. "Turn, O backſliding children, for I am married unto you, Pſalm lxv. 3. Iniquities prevail againſt me: as for our tranſgreſſions, thou ſhalt purge them away." To do otherwiſe, is as if one that is fallen ſhould put his hands in his boſom till he wreſtle up. Faith is the hand of the ſoul, and the uſe of it in its full ſtrength is never unſeaſonable. Deal not with an abſolute God, a God out of Chriſt; that is not for a guilty creature. Chriſt is thy Lord and Huſband, nay, through the vail of the fleſh of Chriſt, "thy Makers are thine Huſbands," Iſ. lvi. 4. one God in three perſons. God was in Chriſt, that thou mighteſt be joined to him there: ſo look thou ſtill to a God in Chriſt, and receive the law at his mouth, and direct thy obedience to him. "Often and willingly, ſaith Luther, do I inculcate this, that you ſhould ſhut your eyes and your ears, and ſay, you know no God out of Chriſt."

2. As your light through this dark-world, John viii. 12. "I am the light of the world," ſays Chriſt. Shut your own eyes, and let him direct your way by his word and Spirit, and ye will walk ſafeſt. Conſult ſin and duty with fleſh and blood, is drawing back from Chriſt. Cleave to him as your oracle: and depend on him for light to mark out your way, Prov. iii. 5, 6. "Truſt in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own underſtanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he ſhall direct thy paths." And

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when ye go to ſeek light in particular caſes, be ready to fall in with what ſhall be found the Lord's mind, in ſingleneſs of heart.

3. As the fountain of your ſtrength for duty, 2 Tim. ii. 1. "Thou therefore, my ſon, be ſtrong in the grace that is in Chriſt Jeſus." Ye have great work to work, ſalvation and generation work; and ye have a great journey to go. It will not be your weak hands that will work the work; nor your feeble knees that will make the journey, Cant. viii 5. Cleave to him and hank on him, like a weak woman on her huſband in difficult way. And never reckon on any ſtrength, but what is in the fountain, be the work more eaſy or difficult, Iſ. xl. 30, 31. "Even the youths ſhall faint and be weary, and the young men ſhall utterly fail. But they that wait upon the Lord, ſhall renew their ſtrength: they ſhall mount up with wings as eagles, they ſhall run and not be weary, and they ſhall walk and not faint."

4. As the ſpring of your fruitfulneſs. John xv. 4. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itſelf, except it abide in the vine: no more can ye, except ye abide in me." Ye muſt ſet yourſelves to the practice of holineſs, without which no man can ſee the Lord, and bring forth good works in your life and converſation, as ye would not write yourſelves ſeparate from Chriſt. But to hammer them out of your own faithleſs endeavours, is to withdraw yourſelves from Chriſt, and to act as ſtanding on a root of your own, and not as branches in Chriſt.

5. As the only ground of your acceptance with God, Eph. i. 6. Col. iii. 17. A pair of turtle-doves might be accepted on the altar at Jeruſalem, while an ox was abomination on the altar at Bethel. To meaſure your acceptance with God, by the quantity or quality of your duties, what they have coſt you one way or other; and not according to the ſhare you have in the Redeemer's blood, is not cleaving to Chriſt, but departing

parting from him. The believer "has no confidence in the fleſh," Phil. iii. 3.

Laſtly, As the reſt and the only reſt of your ſouls, Heb. iv. 3 Matth. ix. 28. "Ye ſhall find reſt, reſt to your conſciences, which ye are ſeeking, but cannot get in the law; reſt to your hearts, which ye are ſeeking, but cannot get in the empty creation. Well, take up the twofold reſt in him, and hold there. Go not gadding about to ſeek them any where elſe but in him. Go not back to the law as a covenant of works, nor to the vain world.

Secondly, Cleave to him in all; for he is altogether and always lovely. And cleave to him,

1. In all that bears his ſtamp as his own. And cleave,

1ſt, To his truths, delivered to us in his holy word, Prov. xxiii. 23. "Buy the truth, and ſell it not." Acquaint yourſelves with them, by the ſtudy of the holy ſcriptures, our Confeſſion of faith and Catechiſms. There is much need for it in theſe our reeling times. As to the purity of the goſpel doctrine, cleave to it with the greater care, that man's corrupt nature is ſuch an enemy to it. The goſpel was no ſooner publiſhed in paradiſe, but an angel with a flaming ſword behoved to be ſet to keep Adam from running back to the law as a covenant of works for life, Gen. iii. 22. And no leſs than the ſight of the flaming ſword will keep any of us back from it yet, if not in principle, yet in practice.

2dly, To his law as the rule of your life, in all the duties of holineſs, John xv. 14. Beware of making exception of the leaſt of them, Matth. v. 19. Cleave to him in firſt table duties of piety towards God, external and internal; in ſecond tables duties of juſtice and mercy towards your neighbours. It will be in vain to call Chriſt Lord, if ye do not the things which he commands.

3dly, To his ordinances and inſtitutions, public, private, and ſecret. They are the wells of ſalvation

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in the weary wilderneſs, which the travellers cannot want. The ordinances of worſhip, diſcipline, and government, as well as purity of doctrine, being the Lord's own inſtitutions, are to be cleaved to, Acts ii. 24.

4thly, To his people following him, and to his intereſts in the world, 1 John ii. 19. Ye muſt take your lot with them in this world, if ye would have your lot with them in the other world "A companion of fools ſhall be deſtroyed." If ye mind for heaven, be companions of thoſe who are travelling thither; and think not to live with the wicked, and die with the righteous. That was Balaam's wiſh, but he fell ſhort of his wiſh, Numb. xxxi. 8.

2. In all times, conditions, and circumſtances, Pſalm cxix. 112. This is the law of the ſpiritual marriage, that one cleave to Chriſt the Lord and Huſband always unto the end. Particularly,

1ſt, Cleave to him in an hour of temptation, which ye may be ſure ye will meet with, 1 Pet. v. 8, 9. As ye are joined to the Lord, deny the renewed ſuits of ungodlineſs and worldly luſts. When temptation come, know ye are on our trials, to prove whether ye will cleave to Chriſt or not.

2dly. Cleave to him on all hazards, Pſalm xliv. 17. And let not the croſs of Chriſt ſcare you from following of him. Lay your account with troubles public and private, as the Lord may ſee meet to try you, but withal that nothing ſhall ſeparate you from him. For motives, conſider,

1. The vows of God are upon you to cleave to Chriſt. Our land is under the bond of a national covenant, and the three nations are under the bond of a ſolemn league and covenant, to cleave to the Lord, however theſe bonds are little regarded in our day. Ye alſo are under ſacramental bonds, to cleave to him. Let the conſcience of all theſe move you to cleave to him; and venture not to ſay, concerning the Lord and his

his Chriſt, as Pſalm ii. 3. "Let us break their bands aſunder, and caſt away their cords from us."

2. It is a backſliding time in which we live; iniquity abounds, and the love of many is waxing cold. The more need ye have to take heed. Chriſt is ſaying to you, Will ye alſo go away?" John vi. 67.

3. Your ſafety and welfare in the world depends entirely upon your cleaving to Chriſt. Hold by him, and ye are ſafe. "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" 1 Pet. iii. 13. Quit him or his way, and ye ſhall certainly fall in the ditch, however ſicker ye may imagine yourſelves: "He that walketh uprightly, walketh ſurely, Prov. x. 9. This world is a wilderneſs: cleave to him, as ever ye would get ſafe through.

4. Laſtly, It is not they that ſet far off, but "thoſe that endure to the end that ſhall be ſaved," Matth. xxiv. 13. Apoſtaſy will bring a man to eternal ruin, Heb. x. 38. but thoſe who are "faithful to the death ſhall receive a crown of life," Rev. ii. 10.

LI JY 63

FINIS.

Margaret Thomas

1788